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AGRIPPA:

OR,

THE NOMINAL CHRISTIAN

INVITED TO

CONSIDERATION AND DECISION.

BY

JOHN JEFFERSON,

ABNEY CHAPEL, STOKE NEWINGTON.

"Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

"Thou hast a name that thou livest."

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AGRIPPA,

§c.

I.

AN OPENING APPEAL TO THE READER.

Are you a Christian? This question deserves your most serious attention. Your consistency as a man, and your forgiveness as a sinner; your usefulness in life, and your peace in death; your acceptance at the bar of God, and your happiness in eternity, are all involved in your being a Christian. The Son of God became incarnate, and died upon the cross in ignominy and blood, that you might be a Christian. The Bible is in your hands, the sabbath periodically returns, and the ministers of Christ preach to you "the word of reconciliation," that you may become a Christian. If this result do not follow, "it were better for you that you had not been born." Permit me, with sincere concern for your salvation, to fix your thoughts upon this solemn inquiry—*are you a Christian?* Do not be angry that your Christianity seems to be called in question. "Thou

hast a name that thou livest ;" but the New Testament applies the term Christian to none but sincere and practical disciples of "our Lord Jesus Christ ;" and it plainly teaches you that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature," 2 Cor. v. 17. No man is born a Christian ; "ye must be born again," John iii. 7. Baptism does not make a man a Christian ; "that which is born of the Spirit is *spirit*," John iii. 6. Pious descent cannot entail the character and privileges of a Christian, nor can any mere human administration of sacraments convey to you the grace ; they who "believe on *His* name, are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God," John i. 12, 13. You may be moral and upright, amiable and charitable, and yet not be a Christian ; "he that hath the Son hath life," 1 John v. 12 ; and he only. You may be regular in your attendance upon the public ordinances of religion, and be admired for your consistency, and commended for your zeal, and still not be a Christian ; "for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love," Gal. v. 6. Paul had much whereof to glory according to the flesh, but "what things were gain to him, those he counted loss for Christ," Phil. iii. 4—9. It is indeed true that on these several accounts you are called a Christian, but of what importance is a name, if you want the thing ? Will the sight of food, or the mere record of your name among the guests at a feast, satisfy your hunger ? Will the knowledge that there *is* a heaven, insure your admission to it ? Will it profit you any thing, when you appear at "the judgment seat of

Christ," to have been called of men a Christian, or to have called yourself such, if HE should then say to you, "Depart from me, I know you not?" Matt. vii. 21—23. Reader, your soul is of unspeakable value. Opportunity to secure its salvation is now given to you. Light shines around your path, and God is waiting to be gracious to "all who call upon him in truth." There is too much reason to fear that multitudes are deluded by the name of Christian, and perish without the blessing. Most earnestly do I invite you to "stand still and consider." I do not speak to you as "a heathen man," knowing nothing of Christ; nor as a "profane person," caring nothing about him; nor as an avowed infidel, despising or denying him; it is sufficiently obvious that these are not Christians. You make a nearer approach to the gate of the kingdom than they do: but if you are only a Christian in name, your condition is still one that awakens deep anxiety. It is, alas, fatally defective, notwithstanding all your personal commendations, and your kinder thoughts and better feelings. Your position is fraught with danger, as well as surrounded with mercy. It involves the most weighty responsibility, and demands of you an immediate and thorough decision to be the Lord's alone. Bear with me; "I seek not yours, but you." You must become something radically different, and essentially "new," or you will fall short of the kingdom of heaven. Sit down to the perusal of this short treatise, impressed with the unutterable importance of the question which it has started, and the object at which it aims. Read with seriousness, with candour, with sincere desire to know and obey the

truth. Read alone, where you can give free vent to every struggling emotion, and every rising desire. Compare all you read with the Holy Scriptures, and pray to God to "open your heart to attend to the things which are spoken."

My first effort will be to put your position fairly before you.

II.

THE POSITION OF THE NOMINAL CHRISTIAN DESCRIBED.

"Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." This is your position ; a state of peculiar mercy and privilege, but still one of affecting deficiency and imminent peril, demanding and deserving your most enlightened attention and anxious care. Perhaps it cannot better be brought before you, than by the case of the inquiring scribe to whom Jesus addressed the words which stand at the head of this section. "And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he [Jesus] had answered them well, asked him which was the first commandment of all ?" He listened attentively whilst the Saviour showed him how the law is fulfilled in love ; in supreme love to God, and equal love to our neighbour ; and then responded, "Well, master, thou hast said the truth : for there is one God, and there is none other but he ; and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength,

and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." His mind was attentive to the truth, and his reply discovered considerable acquaintance with it. He could discern between things that differ, and had some right feeling towards that which is spiritual and holy. "Jesus saw that he answered discreetly;" with some degree of judgment and right impression. He perceived that his state of mind was just that critical state, which without awakening any great anxiety in himself, was calculated to render others who really understood it, deeply and prayerfully anxious about him;—that state which seems to depend upon the direction of the present moment, as to its decision *for* God, or *against* him. "And he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God," Mark xii. 28—34. *Not far* from that kingdom which "is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," and which has the promise of everlasting life; but still not *in* it; at the very gate of entrance, but not entering; encouraged by the invitation to "knock," but hesitating and undecided; aware in some measure of the importance of "entering in at the strait gate," but still standing without. The reply of the Saviour was calculated to awaken gratitude and inspire hope; to suggest privilege and furnish encouragement; yet it implied deficiency, and could scarcely fail to arouse suspicion, and produce fear. This is precisely the position of multitudes who enjoy all the ordinances of the gospel kingdom. They "have a name that they live;" they are "not far from the kingdom of God;" Jesus looks on them with interest, but their holy decision is yet delayed.

Your position is one of unutterable importance. Your connexion with the visible forms of Christianity is all that could be desired. The Bible is in your hands, and you read it. The sabbath recurs, and you observe it. The sanctuary is open, and you frequent it. The children of God meet in solemn prayer, and you are found in their assembly. Your family is trained to the veneration of Christian truth, and the observance of Christian institutions. You are interested in the respectability and comfort of those who "minister in holy things," and are ready to aid by your pecuniary contributions the efforts of Christians to spread the gospel both at home and abroad. You appear willing to be "taught all things which Jesus has commanded;" you "hear gladly, and do many things." Yet, the Saviour does not reign in your heart by his truth, nor have you any scriptural reason to expect that you shall reign with him in heaven. You have not yet "submitted yourselves unto the righteousness of God." The system of gospel truth is not treated by you as an authoritative declaration of the mind and will of God, requiring your cordial reception, and your immediate and entire obedience. The salvation of your soul is not the *one* object of your deep and supreme anxiety. You have some vague hope that it will follow; you are miserable whenever you feel that there can be any doubt about it: but you are not practically devoted to it. You do not yet wrestle with God in prayer for it, as that "one thing" without which you must be wretched for ever, and which He will give to all who sincerely seek it. You do not yet read the Bible, and attend upon the ordinances of the sanc-

tuary, as means of salvation, earnestly desiring that they may prove such to you, and thoroughly setting yourselves to receive and obey "the instruction that tendeth unto life." If there were any such thing as neutral ground in religion, I should say that you occupy it; but there is not. You might seem to stand between the church and the world; perhaps this is the view which you are disposed to take of your position. You do not wish to be "condemned with the world," and you cannot claim to be of the number of "them who are sanctified." Hear, however, the words of the Lord Jesus, "He who is not with me, is against me," Matt. xii. 30. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; the wrath of God abideth on him," John iii. 36. There is no escape from this decision upon your case. It admits all your merciful distinctions, it recognises all your favourable impressions, it attaches all due importance to your good intentions and purposes; but it leaves you among "them who are without, whom God judgeth," 1 Cor. v. 13. There Jesus Christ places you; there I must place you; and there I am anxious that you should now place yourself. See where you stand. "God hath brought near unto you his righteousness," Isa. xlvi. 13; but you "have not submitted to it." You read about it, you hear about it, you think about it, but you have not made it the basis of your hope of salvation. You may not have any other foundation of hope, but you have not this. The ministers of the Gospel "pray you, as in Christ's stead, to be reconciled unto God," 2 Cor. v. 20; and they are unto you "as a lovely song

of one that can play well on an instrument ; but you hear their words, and do them not," Ezek. xxxiii. 32. The church of Christ looks at you with deep and intense interest, and longs to see you verifying all the hopes which she has fondly cherished respecting you, but as yet you have disappointed her expectations, and come short of her privileges. That portion of mankind who are altogether reckless as to the consequences of sinning against God, and less attentive than you are to the forms of religion, are looking up to you as a religious man, and forming their estimate of practical Christianity from your partial conformity to its claims ; and they are hereby in danger of being confirmed in their mistaken notions as to what it is to be a Christian. Meanwhile, your own mind is not at rest. You enjoy no solid peace. " Your calling and election are not made sure," 2 Pet. i. 10. You are " not saved." You are still " without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world," Eph. ii. 12. Are you satisfied with your position ? I know that you are not. If sometimes you feel at ease and are quiet, it is only when your thoughts are not turned in upon yourself, or directed forward to the judgment seat of Christ. On other occasions, you feel that something more is necessary to be done, and to be acquired. Permit then the voice of friendly exhortation and entreaty. I plead with you for the sake of my great master, our only Redeemer and Saviour. I plead with you for your own soul and its everlasting happiness. By all the joys of heaven, and by all the miseries of hell, I plead. Give at least one short hour to serious consideration. Why should you deceive yourself ? " God

is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," Gal. vi. 7.

"Thou hast a name that thou livest." I have adopted in the foregoing statements, general language applicable to a large majority of those who enjoy the general privileges of the gospel kingdom, without making the appointed improvement of them. The description includes many varieties of opinion, many shades of character, and many degrees of religious conviction and feeling; but in its general outline, it exhibits the case of all those whose outward observance of gospel ordinances secures for them the name of Christians, at whatsoever point they stop short of the spiritual obedience which the Saviour demands, and by what considerations soever they are held back from giving up their hearts and lives unto him. Let no reader of this page then hastily conclude that because at some minor point the description may fail exactly to mark his individual peculiarity, he is not intended. Art thou still an unbeliever? "Thou art the man." I do not speak of the theory of Christian truth; the historic facts and the general doctrine; thou believest all this; ("the devils also believe and tremble;") but I speak of that sincere and practical regard to the gospel testimony, which has to do with its true nature and design; which receives it as "a message from God unto thee" for thine own salvation; which acts upon it and obeys it as the authoritative announcement of the *one* plan of God for bringing spiritual life to thy soul. If in this sense thou dost not believe, "thou art the man;" thou art only "almost a Christian."

Whether your case is described by Jesus as the

"way-side" hearer, from whose recollection the word spoken at once vanishes, and upon whose heart it produces only a momentary impression ; or, whether the seed of the kingdom is choked by "the cares of this life, and the deceitfulness of riches," as in their case who "receive seed among thorns ;" or, whether with those who are compared to the "rocky ground," you "receive the word with apparent joy," and for a season continue to express an interest in it, and to exhibit something like fruitfulness, but who afterwards wither and die away ; "thou art the man." Whether you are building your hopes of salvation upon your native virtues, or your acquired excellencies ; upon the mere fact of your privileged relation to Christianity, or on the general doctrine of God's mercy, without respect to Jesus the sole medium of its exercise ; "Thou art the man." Careless hearer of the gospel, "Thou art the man." Thou, who art living without prayer, "Thou art the man." Thou, who art indulging some secret sin, or neglecting some known duty, "Thou art the man." Thou, whose heart is filled with the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, "Thou art the man." Thou, who murmurest at the doctrine of Christ, as "a hard saying ;" thou who doubttest the grace of Christ, as if he were unwilling to save, or unfaithful to accomplish the promise which he has spoken ; thou who art calling into question the authority of Christ, as if he had not the right to rule over thee ; thou who art presuming on the love of Christ, as if his patience would last for ever, "Thou art the man." Whosoever thou art, who dost not make it thy one great business to be saved by the Lord Jesus,

"thou art the man" to whom the appeals of this little treatise are immediately addressed. No mere worldly distinctions of wealth or property, of learning or ignorance, have any place here. No age nor country creates an exception. Thus saith the Lord Jesus, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; and no man cometh unto the Father but by me," John xiv. 6. The single point of inquiry is, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" John ix. 35; for "this is the work of God," the one thing required by him of every man to whom the gospel of reconciliation comes, "that ye believe on him whom he hath sent," John vi. 29. "He that believeth shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned," Mark xvi. 16.

Lay aside, then, dear reader, all evasive excuses, and every vain attempt to escape from the force of the truth. Art thou a believer, in the scriptural and saving sense of the term? Is sin an evil and bitter thing in your estimation? Are you grieved and pained at your heart that you have sinned against God? Do you see and feel that God would be just in sending you to hell, as the punishment of your sins? Are you convinced that as a sinner, you lie at God's mercy, and that if saved at all, it must be in such a way as he shall appoint; since he only can say what is due to himself as governor and judge of all? As a sinner, then, "ready to perish," do you welcome with lively gratitude the message of the Gospel; and with simplicity and faith "look unto Jesus," and to him alone, that you may be saved? Can you appeal to Him and say—

"Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on thee?"

Is this your habitual frame of mind? And is it your settled purpose and endeavour to serve God in holy obedience to his will, and zealous pursuit of his glory all your days? Then you are a Christian. But if this be not the case, you are not a Christian. That state of mind towards the gospel of God, which is in accordance with its character and design, is wanting in you. You may be as near to the kingdom as it is possible to come without entering it, but faith is the only key which unlocks the door. You part company with those who are walking Zionward, at this point. You fail as to that principle upon which God divides mankind into two classes. The "promise is left you of entering into his rest, but you come short of it by your unbelief," Heb. iv. 1. Be persuaded to look calmly and dispassionately at your situation. Deal faithfully with yourself. The eye of God is upon you. His book records the secret workings of your mind. Everlasting consequences are involved. "The time is short." Life is uncertain. Procrastination is as sinful as it is dangerous. The gospel demands as it deserves immediate reception. "Behold, now is the accepted time," 2 Cor. vi. 2. "Thou hast a name that thou livest." Innumerable mercies surround you. "Consider thy ways," Hag. i. 3. Realize thy position, and open thine ear to instruction. There is much to be thankful for, but there is not less to be humbled over. There is room for hope, but there is equally a place for fear. Thus saith the Lord, "Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David," Isa. lv. 3.

III.

THE ADVANTAGES ENJOYED BY THE NOMINAL
CHRISTIAN.

Your position is one of gracious privilege. It bears distinguishing marks of the divine favour, and confers on you peculiar facilities for becoming all that you ought to be. *All the divinely appointed means of grace are enjoyed by you.* You are near to the kingdom of God. The gate of that kingdom stands open before you, and God himself invites you to enter in. Every thing around you is calculated to remind you of the claims of Jesus and his salvation. A thousand influences are brought to bear upon you, urging and drawing you to holy decision. Parental kindness, or Sabbath-school instruction, has taught you from your youth. The Bible, in every page, asserts the supreme authority of your Maker. The Sabbath is a perpetual and public witness for God. Ministers of the Gospel by their preaching, private Christians by their admonitions and their examples, and the churches of the Redeemer by their holy associations and professions, do not cease to persuade you to repent and believe. Not for a single day, or hour, are you permitted to escape from the influence of those circumstances which tend to excite your attention to the Gospel of God. Every providential benefit, as well as every religious ordinance, points you to its Author; whilst every bodily affliction and worldly disappointment calls you in mercy to serious consideration and holy

submission. Your domestic life abounds with proofs of the pure and peaceful effects of Christianity ; and the contrast which obtains at every point between your worldly condition and that of men whose lot is cast beyond the sphere of direct Christian influence, remonstrates with you, and asks why you are not a Christian. All these things are so many tokens of the mercy of God towards you ; so many means employed by him to teach you that "HE hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he should turn from his way and live," Ezek. xxxiii. 11. This manifold combination of circumstances, which directly or otherwise call you to consider the claims of "God in Christ," is not gratuitous or accidental ; it is the arrangement of divine wisdom, and the effect of divine love ; it is more, it is the government of divine mercy. As an intelligent and immortal, but guilty and self-ruined creature, God thus presents to you innumerable inducements to study the revelation of his will, and to seek an interest in his favour. The unmerited kindness in which all this originated, is greatly enhanced by the medium through which it flows. To justify on principles of perfect and universal righteousness the employment of these favourable influences, "God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all," Rom. viii. 32. "Him hath God set forth to be a propitiatory sacrifice through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness in the remission of sins," Rom. iii. 25, 26. "God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, and beseeching you to be reconciled unto him ; for he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the

righteousness of God in him," 2 Cor. v. 18—21. "Behold, what manner of love is this!" Is it thus that God deals with you, when he might justly have consigned you to eternal woe, without any hope of mercy? Is it thus that he has multiplied around you the means of life and salvation—the motives to consideration and prayer? Is it thus that he continues to seek your good from day to day, bearing with your careless oversight of his mercy, and your deliberate refusals to turn unto him? How must *his* heart be set upon your happiness! How anxiously and tremblingly alive must *he* be to the necessities of your souls! How highly must *he* estimate the spiritual good with which you trifle! What boundless compassion must fill *his* breast! And shall so many means be employed with you "in vain, if it be yet in vain?" Must such love still continue to entreat you in vain? Does not God with strict propriety say, "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" Isa. v. 4. Most earnestly would I beg of you not to "despise the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance," Rom. ii. 4;—is designed and adapted to bring thee to repentance, and does actually impel thee by the use of all moral means, exerting a force meant to bring thee to repentance.

But may I not advance a step beyond all that is implied in the general administration of the divine government, and remind you of *the religious knowledge which through these means you*

already possess? You have been shown that God is holy, and just, and good; that you are capable of loving and pleasing him, and that you are accountable unto him in all things. Your reason assents to these doctrines of revealed religion, and your conscience urges you to prompt and practical obedience. Nor are you ignorant of your condition as a sinner against God. You know that you have broken his laws, and despised his supreme authority. You know that you have lived unto yourself, and not in obedience to God, or with a sincere endeavour to please him. And you know that as a sinner, you are exposed to punishment. God is holy, and must show that he is opposed to sin. He is just, and must punish it. He "ruleth over all," and must maintain the rights of his throne, and so conduct his government as to secure the confidence of all his intelligent creatures. None of the imperfections which unavoidably attach to human legislation and rule, can possibly belong to the government of God. Sin cannot go unpunished; and mercy cannot be exercised but in full consistency with all the demands of strict and impartial justice. The desert of sin can be determined by God alone. He alone knows himself, against whom it is committed; and he alone knows in all their extent of obligation, the principles upon which his government proceeds, and the influence which a due regard to those principles exerts upon his creatures. You must therefore receive his own testimony as to the desert of sin; and it is no small advantage which you enjoy in being actually acquainted with it. He has told you in the Bible that "he who

offendeth in one point is guilty of all," Jas. ii. 10 ; and that "the wages of sin is death," Rom. vi. 23 ; which death consists in "an everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power," 2 Thess. i. 9 ; in that world, "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched," Mark ix. 44. You know that you are exposed to this consequence of sinning against God ; that if you escape, it can only be by his mercy ; and that it is his sole prerogative to say whether he will show mercy, and if he will, upon what conditions, and in what mode. He is under no obligation to pardon you, and he must say in what way it is consistent with his just claims to do so. Is it no advantage that you enjoy in possessing this knowledge ? And when the sense of guilt presses upon your conscience, as it sometimes does ; when you tremble in secret, and are afraid to think of death and of eternity ; when the inquiry starts from your mind, "what must I do ?" is it not an unspeakable mercy to be informed concerning the way of salvation ? Think of your privilege in knowing that God has given his Son to be the Saviour of mankind. "The truth as it is in Jesus," is familiar to you. You know *who* he is in whom there is redemption, and *what* he has done for sinners, and how "able he is to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him," Heb. vii. 25. You know that an interest in his salvation is ensured to every one that believeth, and a thousand encouragements urge you to go to him, and to trust in him. How vast are your advantages ! How near are you thus brought to God, and to salvation ! How thankful would many a wounded

spirit, toiling in vain for peace, because ignorant of gospel truth, be for your knowledge! And yet you do not act upon this knowledge; and are only "almost a Christian." Are you making the right use of your advantages?

Think further, how *your condition as a sinner is relieved from much that would be painful and distressing, by your acquaintance with the gospel.* You have your hours of reflection, and your seasons of disquietude. It is useless to conceal the fact. Conscience is not always asleep. The mere formalities of religion do not always satisfy. Would that they never did! At such seasons you are full of anxiety; fears are high, and hope is feeble. But you are never without hope. The light of gospel truth effectually prevents the thick darkness of despair from settling upon your soul. However unwilling you may be to acquiesce in the plan of divine mercy, you are not ignorant of it. Still does it keep alive in your mind the thought that deliverance is possible. And however your knowledge may be abused by unholy trifling and delay, still does it save you from much of that writhing agony which would tear your breast, did you know no way of escape. It is indeed true that you may be found in circumstances, in which this knowledge will but aggravate your wretchedness, as it now augments your guilt, but still, how much do you owe to it! Does it not greatly increase your privilege? If you would rightly improve it, how would it bless you, and lead you in "the path of life."

But more:—*you have some impressions of the value and necessity of religion.* Under some faithful sermon, or by some personal or relative

affliction, or through some friendly expostulation, your slumbering conscience has been aroused, your sins have been brought to your remembrance, and strong convictions of the necessity of repentance have been lodged within you. You have never been able to shake off these convictions. They may have become fainter and less painful, but you still feel that religion is "the one thing needful." Various emotions struggle in your breast. The sabbath renews the convictions which the occupations of the week serve partially to efface. Neither in solitude nor in public are you at rest. Both in the world and in the sanctuary your convictions strive with you. Sometimes fear drives you almost to despair, whilst at other times you have hope that all will be well at the last. Sometimes you charge yourself with cowardice or folly, because you suffer these conflicts to prevail within you; and at other times, there appears to be so much loveliness and reasonableness in religion, that you are all but resolved to be a Christian. Your state is one of habitual irresolution, hesitation, and indecision; but your convictions still persuade you to "obey the truth;" and you try to allay your present anxieties by promising obedience at some future period. Oh that you would consider how much mercy there is in all this! Why are you not altogether hardened and unimpressed? Why has not God delivered you over to the deceitfulness and wickedness of your own heart? Why have you not been left to sin away your convictions? Is it not a token of divine favour towards you that the thoughts of religion are kept alive in your mind? Is not this an encouragement to

you to seek the grace which shall sanctify and save your soul? Your situation is one of deep interest to "all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity;" nay, it is so to the Saviour himself; should it not be so in your own estimation? "The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." One holy, humble, stedfast resolution taken, and all would be right. Advance but one decided step upon your present position, and you will be safe. Why do you not improve your privileges? I "beseech you not to receive the grace of God in vain."

Additional advantages are enjoyed by you in *the examples of true piety which are ever before you*. Religion is daily seen by you, exerting all its purifying and happy influence upon the character and condition of multitudes around you. And you are familiar with the history of some whose conversion and subsequent walk you have closely observed. You knew them in the days of their vanity, and you saw them forsake their sins which before degraded them, and enter upon a new course. The reformation in their conduct was as manifest as it was astonishing. Their former lusts and passions seemed to be destroyed, their very countenances beamed with unwonted amiableness and delight; their habits were completely changed; they were obviously "new creatures in Christ Jesus." Their families, which had been the scene of "confusion and every evil work," became distinguished for order, and unity, and peace; an altar unto God was erected in their houses, and all things were done unto his glory. The sabbath, which before was desecrated to worldly business or pleasure, was sanctified to

the service of Almighty God. You have observed these men in the various relations of society, in the business of the world, and in the fellowship of the church, and have seen them consistent, upright, useful, happy. You have looked on when trials overtook them ; when the hand of God afflicted their persons, their families, or their circumstances ; and have admired their calmness, their resignation, their patience, their peace. You have heard their dying testimony to the faithfulness of God, and the grace of Christ. You have perhaps seen them go out of the world " full of joy through the light of God's countenance ;" committing their spirits into the hand of their Saviour, and their beloved relatives to the care of his providence. They were not perfect, but they were consistent in their endeavours to please God. They were not proud and exalted in their own estimation, but ready to acknowledge their own deficiencies, and kindly considerate towards those of others. They were still " men of like passions with yourselves," but they had such secret springs of happiness as gave them greatly the superiority over you. Religion made them happy. They were privileged to show to you the blessedness of serving God ; and you were favoured to look on and observe it. You have seen in them the theory of religion embodied in the living reality ; and all its claims illustrated and verified. If you were not instructed and impressed by the facts, you ought to have been. But you *did* learn ; you *did* feel. You wondered and admired. You even wished that you were like them, and perhaps breathed a secret prayer that you might be so. Need I tell you that it is

God who has been thus alluring you to "the path of life." In this practical form he has been pressing upon your attention the importance of his service, and commending it to you by its great and varied benefits, as visibly enjoyed by those who engage in it. Is not this an important advantage which your near connexion with "the kingdom of God" has conferred upon you? Must you not admit your vast obligations to "the God of all grace?" In what varied modes, by what interesting and attractive means, does he seek to win you to himself!

The fact that *the only hinderance to your salvation is in yourself*, is another most important feature in your case, vastly augmenting your privilege in the sight of God. God has brought near unto you his righteousness. The atonement for sin is made. In the unsearchable riches of his mercy, your Maker and Judge invites you to return unto him. Every encouragement is held out to you, and every difficulty is removed out of your way. Salvation is promised to you, if you sincerely seek it according to God's directions; promised to you as his gift, "without money and without price," Isa. lv. 1. Your present guilt cannot hinder your salvation, if you now repent; for "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," 1 John i. 7. Satan cannot hinder your salvation, if you now believe in Jesus; for "the Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil," 1 John iii. 8. The world cannot hinder your salvation, if you now "come out, and be separate;" "there are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having

escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust," 2 Pet. i. 4. To suppose that there is any thing in the Divine arrangement itself, which either operates as an hinderance to your salvation, or supplies a lawful excuse for your neglect to seek it, is virtually to deny the truth of the gospel altogether: it not only "makes God a liar," but also charges him with the most refined and gratuitous unkindness, treating with mockery and insult the misery of his creatures, under the pretext of his readiness to save them. The thought is almost too blasphemous to be penned; pursued to its legitimate consequences it will land you in the gloomy regions of atheism; since to invest God with such a character, is in reality to deny his existence. Talk not, then, of the provision of mercy as inadequate to the necessity or the peculiarity of your case. "Christ has wrought out and brought in everlasting righteousness," Dan. ix. 24; and "he is able to save to the uttermost those that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them," Heb. vii. 25. And why entertain the idea of God's unwillingness to bless you? "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Rom. viii. 32. Again, and again, you are assured that if you believe, you shall be saved, and that nothing can condemn you but your own continuance in unbelief. If you read or hear any statements, professing to be statements of gospel truth, which are at variance with these plain declarations of Holy Scripture, they are mis-statements, originating in ignorance or error; they are either misconceptions of what is

revealed, or mere human dogmas which are wholly devoid of authority. All the difficulty is with yourself. It lies in your own sinful disinclination to repent and turn unto God. Thus saith the Lord Jesus, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life," John v. 40 ; and your own conscience testifies that this is the truth. There is some sin, which you will not forsake ; or some pleasure, which you will not forego ; or some sacrifice, upon which you will not venture ; or some objection to the terms of the gospel, which you will not lay aside. The fact is, and you must admit it, that "the grace of God is exceeding abundant" in thus dealing with you. The feast is prepared ; the table is spread ; the provision is suitable and ample ; and you are freely and urgently invited to come and partake of it. But instead of complying, you are seeking by every possible consideration to excuse yourself, and thus strengthening your disinclination, and trifling with your privilege.

To all these advantages which your connexion with the administration of the gospel kingdom gives you, there is to be added *the promised influences of the Holy Spirit*. These influences, as they have to do with conversion, are purely and only spiritual. They are as essential to the existence and prosperity of spiritual life, as his physical influences are to the existence and welfare of physical life. The whole system of means adapted to maintain spiritual life, implies the accompanying influences of the Holy Spirit ; for without these the appointment of the means is altogether useless. Accordingly, you find that the influences of the Holy Spirit, equally with the varied

means by which "the truth as it is in Jesus," is brought into contact with the mind of a sinner, are ascribed to the mediatorial interposition of the Son of God. *The truth, as it is contained in the Holy Scriptures, is the great instrumentality of spiritual influences.* "The sword of the Spirit, is the word of God," Eph. vi. 17; and the apostle James, speaking of the gracious process by which a sinner is brought to God, teaches us that, "of his own will hath he begotten us by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures," James i. 18. Whenever the truth is presented to your mind, the Holy Spirit is present, and all the effect which the truth produces must be referred to his influences. When it proves to you a light, "discovering guilt and sin;" when it comes like "a hammer and a fire, breaking the rock in pieces;" when it is a sweetly persuasive motive, "drawing you near the Lord;" you have in yourself the proof that "there is a Holy Ghost." Your own experience has taught you that these influences are not confined to the mere letter of Holy Scripture, nor to any particular truth as isolated from the rest; still less to any particular agency by which the truth may be set before you, or any particular circumstances under which your attention may be led to it. Whenever, wherever, by whomsoever, "the truth," substantially, simply, "as it is in Jesus," has been brought into contact with your mind, and has gained from you a candid, serious, practical consideration, these gracious influences have been present. All the convictions which you have of the nature and necessity of religion, must be ultimately referred to this source. And to what a gracious extent you have

enjoyed this advantage, it were vain to endeavour to estimate. Recollect then that it is equally vain to try to estimate your gracious privilege. The Spirit of the Lord strives with you. His influences accompany his truth. "The Spirit and the bride" are joined, when the invitation to "come and take the water of life freely" is addressed unto you. What more could God have done for his vineyard? Seriously ponder his inquiry:—"Wherefore—what is the reason—when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" The reason is with yourself. It lies in your own love of sin, and your unwillingness to turn unto God. The fact is as humbling as the guilt is aggravated. Set yourself sincerely and deliberately to ascertain what it is which keeps you from the Saviour. Your immortal welfare is concerned. "*Why* will you die?" At the least, answer it to yourself. Why?—Thus saith the Lord, "Break up your fallow-ground; and sow not among thorns; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he come and rain righteousness upon you," Jer. iv. 3; Hos. x. 12. "Turn you at my reproof; behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you; I will make known my words unto you," Prov. i. 23.

IV.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE NOMINAL CHRISTIAN.

The responsibility of the man who enjoys the privileges of the Gospel, is declared by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, in this impressive language:

"That servant who knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes," Luke xii. 47. All the advantages you possess are so many means to an end; so many inducements offered to you to "obey the gospel," and thus prepare to "give unto the Lord the glory due to his name." The blessedness to which such obedience introduces, is inconceivably great, and everlastingly important. But it presupposes the obedience. There is nothing in the mere means and ordinances of Christianity which can save your soul, irrespective of an appropriate improvement of them on your own part. The principle of the kingdom of grace is that of the kingdom of nature: "The hand of the diligent maketh rich," Prov. x. 4. The obligation also corresponds. As, "he that observeth the wind, shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds, shall not reap," Eccl. xi. 4; so he who neglecteth the means of spiritual benefit, shall lose the harvest of eternal life. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish," Luke xiii. 5. "He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life," John iii. 36. "Without holiness shall no man see the Lord," Heb. xii. 14. To imagine that you are to be made the mere passive recipient of salvation, and, therefore, that all you have to do is to keep yourself within the range of divinely appointed means, and then to sit still and wait until you are made the subject of some mysterious process in which you are to be wholly inactive, is a fearful mistake; a mistake as ruinous in its practical tendency as it is indicative of your own carelessness, and dishonourable to "the God of salvation." Yours is

a vast and solemn responsibility. "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." "Why, even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right?" Luke xii. 48, 57. Can it be, that your natural power of inquiry and application, which is so satisfactorily employed at your pleasure on all subjects of scientific or literary research, is both useless and irresponsible in the weightier matters of religion and of eternity? Can it be, that such a system of moral means as the religion of Jesus Christ introduces and sustains, involves no corresponding obligations? Can it be, that when God commands, it is less your duty to obey, in religion than in providence? that when he calls to serious consideration, to the holy investigation of truth, to repentance, to faith, to prayer, to "seek first the kingdom of God," to "strive to enter in at the strait gate," all he means is that you are to sit still, and continue in careless unbelief, or self-righteous satisfaction? "I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say."

Your capacity to study revealed truth, implies your obligation to do so. The eye, which you allow to wander at random, that it may dissipate serious thought, would, if fixed, aid you to understand the Scriptures; the ear, which listens with delight to the scientific lecture, or the sweet sounds of music, can give equal attention to the preaching of the gospel, and so become the inlet to holy impressions. The same degree of mental power which you employ in the study of abstract science, or devote to the avocations of worldly business, or consume in the anxious cares of domestic life, might be applied with equal success to the investigation of divine truth, and the dili-

gent use of the means of grace. What hinders this appropriation of your faculties, but your cherished disinclination to the themes and objects of religion ?

Perhaps you are saying, " I admit it to be true in the general, that I am capable of fixing my attention on any subject according to my inclination ; and that I can succeed in acquiring a knowledge of it, and in awakening within myself an interest in it, according to the degree of energy and zeal with which I pursue it ;—but I do not think that this is equally true in reference to the deeply mysterious subject of religion." That there are deeply mysterious points of revealed truth, I cheerfully concede to you. If there were not such points, one great proof of the divine authority of the Bible would be wanting. But the simplest and most fundamental principles of physical science, to say nothing of the sublimer operations of nature, are equally mysterious. All objections based on this fact are therefore futile and vain. And you must allow me to tell you that all the topics of the divine word, in so far as they affect the question of your salvation, are plainly revealed, and do lie within the range of this power of intelligent consideration, which I call upon you to exercise. Your own mental and moral character ; your obligations as a creature ; and your condition as a sinner : the just claims of God, who made you, who rules over you, and who will bring you into judgment with himself : the nature and design of your present temporary sojourn upon earth ; the transcendent importance of the eternity to which you are hastening ; and the disclosed plan of divine mercy, showing how

"God can be just, and the justifier of the ungodly," are all themes of study to which your nature is equal. By a simple-hearted and diligent effort, you can understand what is written concerning these points; and you are able to employ with yourself the various considerations which the Bible suggests, as motives to induce a corresponding sense of their vital importance. That the force of these statements may not be lost upon you, or appear to be made for the occasion, permit me to place before you at once a compendious summary of scriptural truth, comprising that which is necessary to be known in order to your salvation; and to beg your devout and fixed attention to it.

"God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions," Eccl. vii. 12. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," Rom. iii. 23. "The wages of sin is death," Rom. vi. 23. "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight," Rom. iii. 20. "Every mouth is stopped, and all the world is guilty before God," Rom. iii. 19. "God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," 2 Cor. v. 19—21. "Be it known unto you, therefore, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified freely from all things," Acts xiii. 38, 39. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him," John iii. 36. "Behold,

now is the accepted time ; now is the day of salvation," 2 Cor. vi. 2. "Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart," Heb. iii. 7, 8. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matt. xvi. 26. "Behold, the Judge standeth before the door," Jas. v. 9. "Repent ye, and believe the gospel," Mark i. 15.

There is nothing here which is above your capacity. Do not, then, deceive yourself by any mistake as to your responsibility. Does not God rightly hold you accountable for the use of your capacity to know his will?

Your liberty as a moral agent also implies your responsibility. You do "not act by constraint, but willingly." You choose your own ways, rejecting that to which you are averse, and pursuing that which accords with your inclination. You feel that when you sin you do so voluntarily, and that you are equally at liberty to abstain from sinning, were you but disposed to do so. Are you not then an accountable being, fully responsible for your conduct? When God makes known to you his will, shows you what is your duty, and by various motives persuades you to perform it, are you not responsible for the decision to which you come?

The supremacy of God should teach you your responsibility. Has he not an undoubted right to command your service according to his own will? Is he not your maker? Are you not continually dependent upon him? Does he not necessarily rule over all? Is he not the first being, the greatest and the best? Must not his

will give law to the universe? Does it not give law to you? If you obey, will he not bless you as he hath spoken? If you disobey, shall he not require it? These inquiries derive increased force in their application to the gospel as an authoritative announcement of the divine will. The gospel is "the perfect law of liberty;" and the supremacy of God is therein more apparent than in any other department of his government. Man, as a sinner, is entirely dependent upon "the good pleasure of God." In infinite grace, God still rules you by persuasive motives, addressed to your intelligent and free nature, and adapted to your fallen and guilty condition. But all his appeals, whilst breathing the spirit of love, are clothed with supreme authority. They announce *His* will, and declare *your* duty. The gospel is to you *the law* as well as *the means* of life and happiness; and it demands obedience. It is true you may "reject this counsel of God," and in doing this throw yourself back upon the original law of our nature, which required perfect obedience, and threatened death to the first transgression; but in doing this you not only exercise the power upon the ground of which you are responsible, you also incur the guilt of disobedience to the gospel. Consider, I entreat you, the circumstances under which God shows his supremacy over you, and see how they involve your responsibility. You were born under a form of government, whose fundamental principle is the vicarious sacrifice of the Son of God, and all whose requirements are directed to your recovery from sin, and your introduction to the favour and service of God. Every motive is suggested which even divine mercy itself can supply, to induce your attention and obedience. You

have this "perfect law of liberty" in your own hands. You read it in the Holy Scriptures ; you hear of it from the pulpit ; you see its influence and effects in the general state of society around you, and in the personal character and happiness of those who cordially obey it. You are persuaded, exhorted, entreated to "be reconciled unto God." Life and death are set before you, and the command of God is, "Choose life." Your responsibility is solemn indeed. "As workers together with God, we beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain," 2 Cor. vi. 1. Obedience is your bounden duty. Mere knowledge cannot profit. Outward privileges cannot save. Obedience is required. "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass ; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed," Jas. i. 22—25. God requires you to "submit yourself," penitentially, cordially, thankfully acquiescing in the arrangement which he has made to glorify his holy name in your salvation. What then is your duty ?

There is yet another view of the grounds and principles of your responsibility, which demands your attention ; *the process by which a sinner is brought to exercise "faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ."* "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," Rom. x.

17. It is not necessary to restrict the sentiment of this statement to the ordinances of preaching and hearing. These are selected because they are the most public and the most general means of salvation. But the idea is this: the *suitable*—that is, the attentive and serious, the humble and simple—*consideration of the truth, is the process by which a man is brought to believe, unto the saving of the soul.* This sentiment is implied in that passage of James cited before: “Of his own will hath he begotten us, by the word of truth.” To the same point also the exhortations of the Saviour necessarily tend. “Take heed, therefore, *what* you hear,” Mark iv. 24; that it be the truth of God, and not the mere dogmas or speculations of men. And “take heed also *how* you hear,” Luke viii. 18; “lest at any time your heart should be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” There is then an important sense in which you must be active in becoming religious, and in reference to which you are responsible. Intelligent application to the truth is required. Watchfulness over yourself is necessary. A temper and spirit in accordance with the character and design of the Gospel are implied. For this state of mind, and this exercise of your intellectual and moral nature, you are held responsible. Do you not feel that this is right? Will you not seriously consider what you ought to do? What line of conduct will lead to your happiness? What will best accord with the infinite and unmerited loving kindness of God?

The extent of your responsibility deserves your best attention. It is proportioned to your privileges. Advantages and obligations exactly cor-

respond. How great your advantages are, has already been told you. Every means of salvation is enjoyed by you. Every moment of time, and every passing event, is increasing your responsibility. The love of God is greater towards you every day, as his forbearance continues, and his patience waits. Every new mercy sheds new light upon the value of the Redeemer's sacrifice, the medium of every good. Every new impression made upon your minds in favour of religion, yields you a fresh proof of "the love of the Spirit," who thus strives with you. What an accumulated load of guilt will rest upon you if you "neglect the great salvation!"

Compare your advantages with your deserts. Why are you not left in ignorance, and given over to despair? Why is not your condition that of "the angels that sinned?" Why is not the gospel you have despised taken from you? Why has not your unbelief met the "sorer punishment," of which it "must be thought worthy," since you "have trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and have done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" Heb. x. 29.

Compare your condition with that of your forefathers. Look back but a short period upon the religious history of your country, and how few were the facilities of knowledge and impression compared with those which you possess. The free circulation of the word of God, the multiplied opportunities of public instruction, the augmented influences of religious society and example, and the unfettered liberty with which you can worship

God, and seek your spiritual improvement, greatly augment your privileges above theirs. Why this difference in your favour? Is it not an additional proof of the tender mercy of our God, which you should be concerned rightly to improve?

But what is the condition of multitudes of men, your contemporaries? Why were you not born in some distant heathen clime; under the polluting and withering influence of some cruel superstition; taught to bow down to an image of wood or of stone, and to offer "the fruit of your body for the sin of your soul?" "Who hath made thee to differ?" "What hast thou which thou hast not received" from the unmerited kindness of God? Is it not reasonable that he should require it?

Under these circumstances, the *scriptural statements concerning your responsibility*, should gain your most cordial and unhesitating reception. If your present obligation be shown to lie in obedience to the gospel of God, is it not your reasonable service? Permit me to place this obligation before you in the words of Him whose you are: "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," Isa. i. 16—18. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have

mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon," Isa. lv. 6, 7. "Repent, and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call," Acts ii. 38, 39. "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God," John iii. 18, 19. Let these sayings sink down into your hearts. Consider them. Try to understand them. Apply them to yourself. Read them, and dwell upon them as the words of God. "He that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God." *His* anxiety that you should realize the fact of your responsibility, and improve your advantages, is vastly greater than that which any creature can feel for you. "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" Deut. xxxii. 29. "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea," Isa. xlviii. 18. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Ezek. xxxiii. 11. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how

often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not," Matt. xxiii. 37.

Set yourself, then, now to *realize aright this vast responsibility*. The "form of godliness" is "not the power." The name of Christian does not necessarily imply the privilege or the character. Hesitation to think and act in compliance with the instructions of God, is positive disobedience. Delay is insult to the grace of the moral governor, as well as continued trifling with the interests of your own soul. Presumption upon future opportunities is renewed and perpetuated rebellion. All excuses are sins. There is nothing to wait for. Your advantages for knowing the gospel, and your motives to obey it, cannot be increased. Every thing is more favourable *now* than it can be at any future period. Procrastination hardens the heart, and sears the conscience. "Will you revolt more and more?"

Let the character of God win you to consideration. He is not an arbitrary despot, "reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strawed;" but an equitable ruler, "holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works," Psa. cxlv. 17; whilst he is also a God of love, "who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth," 1 Tim. ii. 4. Is it not wisdom to obey his voice?

Your own condition is one of aggravated guilt, and fearful exposure to punishment. Its effectual relief is provided for in the gospel plan; and this by the free favour of God, entirely irrespective of even a wish or a prayer on your part. All that is required of you is to take the benefit "without

money, and without price," in the spirit of sincere contrition, and with grateful faith, as an act of submission unto God who rules over all. If obedience be not reasonable under these circumstances, tell me what could make it so. As an intelligent creature, is it not your duty to consider the claims of this gospel? As a guilty creature, is it not your privilege to do so? Is it not a strange infatuation that prevents you from seizing at once, with a thankful heart, and with entire confidence, the relief which is thus graciously brought nigh unto you?

The consequences involved are the most interesting and solemn. They connect themselves with your immortal destiny, with "the judgment-seat of Christ," and the issues of the great last day. Nothing less than the salvation or the destruction of your soul; everlasting happiness with God, or everlasting separation from him, are to be considered here. Your present decision may fix your final condition. You know your Lord's will; if you do not prepare yourself, nor act according thereto, with what stripes shall you be beaten? "Submit yourself unto God;" for "he will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." "The Lord grant unto you that you may find mercy of the Lord in that day!"

V.

THE DEFECTIVENESS OF MERE NOMINAL
CHRISTIANITY.

“Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them who sit in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, who hast the form of knowledge, and of the truth in the law.” Your professions bring you into visible association with the disciples of Jesus. Your character presents, at so many points, a close resemblance to the will of Christ, that it commands amongst men the respect and esteem which are due to genuine piety alone, and you, perhaps, think that all is right; but, in God’s estimation, you are radically defective. You are still a stranger to the sanctifying influences of the truth, and to its spiritual authority and dominion. Your religion does not rule *you*, but you rule *it*. The gospel has come to you in word only. Your religion is a shadow without the substance, a mere phantom without the reality. “Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” The vital principle is wanting. All the external beauty and decoration is that of a corpse; it looks like life, but it is cold and motionless. This is a startling thought, but it is the truth. “Be not deceived, God is not mocked.” You had better wake up from the slumber of carnal repose now, than have

to learn your true condition at that day when "the righteous Judge" shall say to you, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting;" "depart from me." Is not your soul of infinite worth? Does it not demand the most serious and supreme attention? Let me earnestly beseech you to examine carefully the truth which affects your salvation. "The form of godliness is not the power." "What will it profit you," though you have all the commendable qualities of the youth whom "Jesus loved," and though you excite in the Saviour's breast the same emotions of benevolent regard, if he should say to you as he said to him, "One thing thou lackest?" That "one thing" was a fatal deficiency. It led to separation from Christ. One point short of salvation is condemnation; one step short of heaven is hell. Be persuaded, therefore, to "search and try your ways." Let the light of sacred truth find now a ready access to your mind. "A promise being left you of entering into God's rest," why should you "come short of it?"

Do you ask, then, *What is the point of deficiency?* I must answer this question by asking you another:—*Dost thou believe on the Son of God?* Be not offended at the simplicity of this inquiry. "If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather, then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" "Believe, and be saved." "Submit yourself unto the righteousness of God," and inherit eternal life. "Come, follow me, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." Do not turn aside because of the repetition of this inquiry. "Faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ" is the one

point on which the affair of your everlasting happiness turns. This is the vital principle of religion, and you "are dead," if destitute of it. There is no entrance upon "the path of life," but by this gate. There may be a thousand valuable—and, in your own account, redeeming qualities in your case, but, "without faith it is impossible to please God;" without this, there is no true obedience to God, and consequently no well-founded hope of interest in his mercy. Take not my word for this. Hear again the words of the Lord Jesus: "He that heareth my words, and believeth on him who sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life," John v. 24. "This is the will of him that sent me, that every one who seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day," John vi. 40. "But he that believeth not shall be damned," Mark xvi. 16; yea, "he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God," John iii. 18. What, then, do you say to these things? Do you believe? Do you, from the heart, obey that word of doctrine which is delivered unto you? The question will force itself upon you. *This is "the mark,"* for the prize of the high calling." You may have all knowledge: you may attend on all ordinances; you may enjoy all advantages; you may be the subject of strong convictions; your moral character may be blameless, and your temporal charities abundant; you may even take your place among the professors of religion, and be joined with them in the most sacred ordinances,

and in liberal efforts to do good ; but if you do not "believe the gospel," you cannot be saved. This is the appointment of God, and you lie at his mercy, and cannot alter his decision. This is the Saviour's claim, and nothing can be substituted for it. This is the principle and element of true Christianity, and there is no religion without it. The simple character of the requirement only declares more fully the grace of God, and strengthens your obligation to obey. And there is no mystery about believing the gospel. You are a sinner, and need a Saviour. Jesus Christ died to save sinners. As a sinner, obey the command of God, and trust in Jesus in order to your own salvation, and salvation is yours. If, instead of doing this, you will try to evade the charge of guilt, or deny the "sinfulness of sin ;" if you are resolved to harden your heart, and perpetuate your rebellion ; or if, admitting your sinfulness, you will labour to devise some other method of deliverance from the punishment to which sin exposes, and to substitute some other principle as the spring of obedience and love to God, "is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance ?" However you may conceal the truth from yourself, depend upon it, your love of sin, in some form or other, is the sole reason why you do not thus believe. Inquire seriously into the cause, for the implied deficiency is a most serious one. "Let no man deceive you." Do not deceive yourself. The testimony of God is so plain, that you cannot deliberately mistake it. Now that your attention is turned to this question, do not allow it again to escape, without such an investigation as its paramount importance demands. What is it that

keeps you from Christ? Is it an unwillingness to part from what is evil? Is it the pride of that which is good? Is it a reluctance to employ yourself in the service of God? Whatever it be, be resolved to discover it. Why should you fall short of the kingdom of God?

Perhaps these statements may appear to you less arbitrary, if I show you that you do not bear the Christian's character. Not that either you or I are at liberty to escape from the naked authority of the divine will in this matter. We must be saved according to his will, or perish. But in order to produce in our minds a suitable regard to his will, it is lawful for us to look at our case in any point of light in which he has been pleased to set it before us in his holy word. He has there described the character of a Christian. By comparing ourselves with the outline, we may discover whether any of its genuine features exist, where this principle of submissive and obedient believing is wanting. You will admit that "*godly sorrow*" for sin is one mark of a scriptural Christian. "*Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of,*" 2 Cor. vii. 10. Sin is committed against God, and Christian sorrow for it has to do with it as such. David thus confessed his sin, even when man was the immediate object of it: "*Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight,*" Ps. li. 4. In like manner the prodigal son is represented returning to his father, with this acknowledgment: "*Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son!*" Not only is it true, that as an unbelieving sinner you are destitute of this "*godly*

sorrow;" it is equally true that it implies "faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ," as the very basis of its existence. Not till the evil of sin be seen by you in the cross of Christ, where alone God displays his utter abhorrence of it, can it awaken in your breast a class of feelings corresponding to those with which God regards it; and, certainly, you will never venture thus to confess your sin, until believing that "God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself," you do so with the hope of forgiveness, and the sincere purpose to be holy. How either can you *pray* aright, until you believe? Not only are you required to pray "in the name of Jesus Christ," which implies faith, but the very offering up of a sincere desire to God for salvation is impossible until you believe the gospel. What other warrant have you to pray for salvation? Or how can you sincerely ask for that which you do not believe that you will obtain? Yet prayer is an essential and invariable characteristic of the genuine Christian. I need not quote a multitude of texts to prove to you that a Christian is *a holy man*. Every where he is spoken of as one who abandons his old vices, and cultivates new virtues; one who renounces self, and cherishes a supreme regard to God; one whose humility, whose delight in the service of God, whose patient suffering and joyful hope, all proclaim the fact of his separation from the rest of mankind, and prove that he is "a new creature in Christ Jesus." But is any motive short of that which only faith in Christ supplies, sufficient to induce such a change in your character and life? This question is submitted to you as one of experience. Have not all other motives been

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tried and failed? And do you not feel that were you now to believe, holiness must follow? that a surrender to "God in Christ," is the germ and commencement of true holiness? Examine yourself at one point more. Why do you not *love the Lord Jesus Christ*? You know that love to him is an essential ingredient of Christian character. You know that his excellence is so portrayed in the gospel, as most unequivocally to show his claims on your love. You know that a fearful curse is denounced upon the man who does not love him. Nor do you need to be told that the love which he demands and deserves, is far more than the mere negation of positive hatred, which has been hitherto the sum total of your love to him. You know that love to Christ is a lively, fervent, practical affection, subordinating every other attachment and preference, and commanding the entire consecration of our whole nature to his glory. Why do you not so love him? Is it not because you do not believe on him? If you should now receive in submissive faith, "the testimony of God concerning his Son;" if you should now, as a perishing sinner, believe in Christ as your Saviour, you would at once be filled with love to him. How can you love him whilst you exercise no faith towards him? It is plain then, that "faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ" is the principle by which Christian character is produced, and the foundation on which it rests; the very element of its vitality; the energy by which it acts; and the strength by which it suffers; the victory which overcomes its enemies; and the sustaining power of its immortal hopes. You cannot be a Christian without

this faith; and you have the proof of this in yourself. So long as you continue in unbelief, you are a stranger to those dispositions which characterize and bless the Christian. Do not then, any longer, content yourself with "a name to live, whilst you are dead." See, how radically defective you are, whilst you keep your heart from the Saviour; and let this thought awaken the most deliberate and serious investigation of your position.

The inference which arises from these views of your case, is one which ought to fill you with the greatest anxiety. You have much that calls for exalted gratitude and praise. Your privileges under the gospel are inconceivably valuable. God is dealing very graciously with you. You are very near to the kingdom of God: "Almost persuaded to be a Christian;" but, alas! this is the whole; and the unavoidable conclusion upon your case is, that you have still no part in the great salvation. Jesus is preached to you, but he is not your Redeemer. Mercy is offered to you, but you have not accepted it. Heaven is open before you, but you are not walking in the way to it. You are near the cross, and near the throne, but you are not interested in the sacrifice of the one, nor in the spiritual gifts of the other. I speak not now of your guilt, or your danger. This will follow. I am anxious in the mean time, to set before you your amazing loss, that you may learn how defective a thing mere nominal Christianity is. O be persuaded to look at your case as it is. You are a sheep without a shepherd; an orphan without a friend; a creature without a God; a sinner without a Saviour.

The wide universe does not present a greater object of pity.

I need not tell you that *you have no experience of the Christian's happiness*. Religion does bless those who are the subjects of it. You see that they are happy; and when you endeavour to analyse their happiness, you find that it is a more substantial and elevated thing than you could otherwise have conceived. It does not consist in mere lively and pleasurable emotions; it is the result of steady principles and consistent practice. Your knowledge of the truth serves only to embitter the hour of reflection; but the Christian makes "the statutes of God his songs in the house of his pilgrimage," *Psa. cxix. 54*. Your feelings of the importance of religion only aggravate your disquietude; but the convictions of the Christian draw him near to God, and to his throne, and yield him unfeigned satisfaction, as they deepen his penitence, and strengthen his faith. When you think of God as "nigh at hand," beholding your every action, hearing every word, and registering every thought, your purest pleasure is marred, and your brightest hour beclouded; but the Christian realizes the presence of God, and, exulting in it, exclaims, "Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved," *Psa. xvi. 8*. If you meditate on the solemn realities of the world to come, it is only to be filled with appalling fear. The thought of being with God yields you no delight; but the Christian looks up, and says, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion

for ever," Psa. lxxiii. 25, 26. You are present in the solemn assemblies of the saints ; your conscience would not be at ease without this ; but when you hear the Christian sing—

" I have been there, and still would go,
'Tis like a little heaven below,"

you wonder what it is that imparts the joy. Trials and afflictions are the common lot of all men, and you have your share of them. When they press heavily upon you, you are ready to sink under them ; you are at a loss to know why you thus suffer, and in your heart you murmur, and "charge God foolishly." If, however, you look at the Christian, suffering more than that of which you complain, and destitute, it may be, of many of those temporal comforts by which your afflictions are alleviated, you find him calm, patient, resigned, thankful ; "glorying even in tribulations also," Rom. v. 3. It were easy to extend these illustrations. But is it necessary ? Would it not be to aggravate your woe ? Do you not feel that it is a sad deficiency which belongs to mere nominal Christianity ? How much happiness do you lose ! happiness, as graciously insured to you as to any sinner upon the earth, if you will cordially and practically embrace the gospel ; happiness purer far than any thing else, except "the fulness of joy" in heaven ; happiness which strengthens in affliction, and triumphs over death.

Your condition deserves to be viewed also in its relative connexion. You have no share in the peculiar privileges of the Christian, as a believer in Jesus Christ. You have not "received the Spirit of adoption, to cry unto God, Father,

Father." The spirit of disobedience, which still rules in your heart, prevents your delighting yourself in the Lord, and appropriating, as a child, the promises of his grace. You must first have sympathy with the children of God in their dispositions and pursuits, before you can have an interest in their peculiar privileges. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry," *Psa. xxxiv. 15.* All the resources of his infinite nature, and all the stores of his spiritual fulness are pledged for their welfare. His power is their defence, his wisdom their guidance, his grace their strength. To him they can go in every "time of need," and ask what they will, according to his promise, and in full expectation of his blessing. If they are straitened, it is not in God, it is in themselves. "They have not, because they ask not; or, they ask and have not, because they ask amiss," *Jas. iv. 2, 3.* In the providence of God "all things work together for their good," *Rom. viii. 28;* and "the Spirit also helpeth their infirmities, for he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God," *Rom. viii. 26, 27.* The world may be in arms around them, but they are "kept in perfect peace, because they trust in the Lord," *Isa. xxvi. 3.* Their afflictions may abound; disappointments, and losses, and crosses may attend them; their foes may be many, and their friends few, but they are "full of joy and peace in believing," *Rom. xv. 13.* To them, "death is no more the king of dread." They "know in whom they have believed, and are persuaded that he will keep that which they have committed unto him

against that day," 2 Tim. i. 12. Whilst they live, it is their privilege to "live unto the Lord." By their example, their influence, their prayers, their efforts, they witness for him, and lead others to him. And when they die, they "die unto the Lord," Rom. xiv. 8; glorifying him by their faith, and encouraging others to follow in their steps. "Looking unto Jesus, as the author and finisher of faith," Heb. xii. 2, they "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Relying on his promise, they are assured that when "absent from the body, they shall be present with the Lord," 2 Cor. v. 1—9. And contemplating their union to Christ as "the head of his body the church," they look forward with holy and triumphant expectation to that day when they shall "awake in his likeness." The prospect of the resurrection from the dead, and of the glory which shall then follow, sustains them in life, and supports them in death. But how shall I describe to you their glories in the heavenly Jerusalem? They will be like Christ, in body and in soul, and for ever happy with him. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," Rev. vii. 16, 17. Every imperfection of character will be removed, and they will be found "without fault before the throne of God," Rev. xiv. 5. Every occasion of disquietude and unhappiness will be banished, and every source of pleasure and satisfaction opened. The noblest services will command

their untiring energies, and the purest fellowships centre their ardent affections. All fear of subsequent evil will be destroyed, for "there shall be no more curse," Rev. xxii. 3. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people; and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away," Rev. xxi. 3, 4. These gracious privileges and glorious prospects are enjoyed by all the children of God. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace, [this state of favour or privilege,] wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God," Rom. v. 1, 2. All is the result, established and certain, of that submission to "God in Christ," which the gospel requires. But you have "neither part nor lot" in these distinctions. You are "almost a Christian," but you are no more. You participate largely in the name, but you have no share in the reality.

"He makes the saint and sinner prove,
The common blessings of his love;
But the wide difference that remains,
Is endless joys or endless pains."

This, then, is your alarming deficiency. You are not happy now, and you have no "good hope" of happiness hereafter. You are not "a new creature in Christ Jesus;" and, "except you repent, you must perish," Luke xiii. 5. Not-



withstanding all your advantages in the sight of God, and all your superiority to multitudes amongst men; notwithstanding your knowledge, your convictions, your resolutions, your hopes, you are "neglecting the great salvation, and how shall you escape?" Heb. ii. 3. You are "without God, and without hope in the world," Eph. ii. 12. "Oh, that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night, because of the slain of the daughter of my people!" Jer. ix. 1. Consider how deeply affecting your case is. Did Jesus die in vain for you? Must the Holy Spirit strive with you in vain? Will you come so near to the kingdom, and still not enter in? Must the misery of your final condition be aggravated by the recollection of so much mercy slighted and abused? If angels weep, it is over you. If devils have joy, it is in the condemnation of such as you. If despair have a bitterness beyond itself, that must be your portion, if you do not repent and turn unto God. "Awake to righteousness, and sin not." The fountain is open. Jesus is able. Power is in the word, and grace in the influence that accompanies it. "Come, take the water of life freely."

VI.

THE GUILT OF THE NOMINAL CHRISTIAN.

When Felix trifled with the solemn reasonings of Paul, and with the still more solemn strivings of the Holy Spirit ; when he said to both the messenger and the message, as he quenched his convictions, and hardened his heart, " Go thy way for this time," Acts xxiv. 24, 25, did he not commit a great sin ? Is your continuance in a state of practical unbelief less guilty ? Have you not heard the gospel more frequently than Felix ? Are you not more fully aware of the consequences of disobeying it ? If guilt be proportioned to means of knowledge, and inducements to obedience, must you not be looked upon as even more guilty than he ? I do not charge you with a denial of the truth. You avow your belief of the divine origin of Christianity, and I have no reason to question your sincerity. But you do "not obey the gospel." If you do not reject it, you do not cordially embrace it. If you do not positively refuse to submit to it, you still withhold your heart from it. You are in the situation of those, concerning whom the Saviour spoke, when he said of the Holy Spirit, " He will reprove the world of sin, because they believe not on me," John xvi. 9. This guilt I am now to declare to you. Spirit of God, guide my mind to the right application of thy truth, and open the sinner's eyes that he may see !

I. Your continuance in the position of a merely

nominal Christian, is a great sin against God, the righteous governor of the world. He points you to Jesus, saying, "Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people," Isa. lv. 4. He requires you to submit yourself to Him in Christ, acknowledging your past sinfulness, feeling your absolute dependence upon his sovereign mercy, and pledging yourself to holy obedience. He distinctly assures you that he cannot forgive your sins, and look with favour upon you, except you thus comply with his will. With equal certainty does he encourage you to expect every spiritual and eternal good, as the result of your obedience; not, indeed, in the way of merit, but "according to the riches of his grace." His wondrous love in the gift of his Son to be your Saviour, is the great argument which he employs with you to induce your acquiescence in the terms of his mercy. At the same time, he commands your obedience, as your first duty. The gospel is to you the law of God. "The law of liberty," it is true; but still a law, sanctioned by his supreme authority, and threatening all disobedience with a "sorer punishment" than that which guilt, incurred under less favourable circumstances, will receive. If disobedience to the gospel, imply ingratitude for the favour of God, as well as contempt of his authority, it is not on this account the less guilty. The greater the privilege, the kinder the spirit, and the richer the grace of the command, so much the more reasonable is the obedience required. A creature in rebellion against his Maker, is under any circumstances a most affecting and disgraceful sight. But what is the guilt,

when a sinful creature, blessed by the mercy of God with such opportunities of pardon and salvation as you enjoy, not only perpetuates his former rebellion, but ungratefully and wilfully enters upon and pursues a new course of disobedience? If the transaction was between a human governor, and the culprit who lay condemned to die, what would be thought of it? Yet no case of guilt can be supposed, between one man and another, which can at all be compared with this. As no authority is so supreme as that of God, nor any benevolence so vast, so no disobedience is so aggravated and guilty as disobedience to him. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master; if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts, unto you that despise my name," Mal. i. 6.

There is another leading view of the sin of unbelief, as committed against God, which demands equal attention. "He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son," 1 John v. 10. You cannot offer a greater affront to a man than to treat him as a liar, even though he should not be pre-eminently distinguished for his regard to truth. How deeply *you* would be wounded, if you had made a promise to distribute large favours to all who needed them, on the simple condition that they should come and ask them, and all should disbelieve you! How much more grievous would this be, if the parties so invited were already chargeable with some heinous crime which left their lives entirely at your mercy, and the favour offered to them was nothing less than a free pardon, and this through the mediation of

your own Son ! What then shall be said of the guilt of "making God a liar?" "He is the rock ; his work is perfect ; and all his ways are judgment ; a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he," Deut. xxxii. 4. Your life is in his power. "The record concerning his Son," is a record of infinite grace. Its aspect upon your welfare, is most disinterested and benevolent. The obedience of faith is as beneficial to yourself, as it is glorious to God. Perfect excellence and boundless love demand corresponding gratitude and esteem. But unbelief is a practical denial of both the one and the other. No insult can be compared with it. Why should it be daily chargeable upon *you* ? Why should the continual repetition of the sin augment perpetually your load of guilt ? "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," Heb. x. 31. No longer, I pray you, "turn away from him that speaketh unto you from heaven," Heb. xii. 25. "For even our God is a consuming fire," Heb. xii. 30.

II. Continuance in unbelief is a great sin against the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of mankind. The apostle speaks of it as a "treading under foot the Son of God, and counting the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing," Heb. x. 29. It is nothing less than a complete setting aside of "Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant;" and this under such circumstances as pour the greatest contempt upon his personal glory and his official claims. You may not deny, or even doubt concerning, his divine nature, and his gracious work. You perhaps receive the scriptural testimony con-

cerning both without hesitation. But both are revealed to you with a specific design, and for a practical intent; and until this end be gained, your bare reception of the testimony is worse than useless. Whilst you keep your heart from the Saviour, and think to be happy without him, you are still in unbelief; still destitute of personal interest in his salvation, and still chargeable with this fearful contempt of his holy claims. You may not positively intend to offer an affront to "the Son of God;" but the question is not, what do you intend; but what is the effect of your conduct in failing to "give unto Him the glory due to his name?" Is it not such an affront? Besides, I need not remind you, that the actions of an intelligent being have an aspect upon all his relations, entirely irrespective of direct intention on his part. Nor need I show you, that the neglect of a duty must oftentimes be regarded as equally guilty with the perpetration of a crime. This is precisely applicable to the present case. The aspect of your conduct towards the Saviour, wears upon it all the contempt of which the apostle speaks; whilst the guilt of it is that of a positive transgression. Your refusal to trust in Christ is a practical disputing of his claims as Messiah; it asks with the Jews, "What sign showest thou then, that we may see and believe?" John vi. 30.—Your unbelief is an open denial of the necessity of his work; it assumes that "righteousness" may still come by works of law, and thus declares that "Christ is dead in vain," Gal. ii. 21; v. 4. It treats the great fact of Christianity, than which nothing in history is more amply confirmed, the resurrection of Jesus,

as "a cunningly devised fable;" for he is "declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead," Rom. i. 4. If you believe his resurrection, how can you justify your neglect of his sacrifice, and your disobedience to his authority?—Unbelief also impeaches his character; it treats his wisdom as folly, his holiness as impurity, his love as mere affectation and display. In casting aside as unprofitable or unnecessary the great doctrine of his mediation, you offer the most direct insult to his perfect and infinite nature, all the vast resources of which are displayed in it for our salvation. Either Jesus is not what he is herein shown to be, or unbelief is thus guilty.—In not submitting to the authority of the gospel, you rob Christ of his reward. "The travail of *his* soul," was for the salvation of *yours*. But so long as you withhold your heart from Him, and either despise salvation, or seek it by some other means, you rob him of his reward. You keep back that which would augment his satisfaction. You refuse to become a jewel in his crown, so long as you hesitate to be a subject of his sceptre.—Thus is it that you "tread under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant wherewith *he* was sanctified an unholy thing." What other interpretation of your conduct could an intelligent bystander adopt, to whom the gracious announcements of the gospel were told, and who was at the same time made acquainted with your special interest in that gospel? Must you not admit that this is the truth? Perhaps you have never seen your neglect of Jesus in this light before. Be thankful that you see it now. If he be "the Son

of God," "the one mediator between God and men," the only way to the Father, and the only foundation of a sinner's hope for eternity, a merely nominal regard to his name, has all the guilt of the most open and decided rejection of him! To admit the doctrine of Christ in theory, to profess to understand it, to acknowledge that you are "almost a Christian," as near to the kingdom of God as you can be without being in it, is not to palliate your guilt, but to increase it. With all these advantages, yourself being judge, you are still, "without Christ;" still disobedient, unthankful, unholy! Oh, that you would now "look upon Him whom you have pierced!" Why should he be wounded again; and by *you*, who profess to be his friend? "I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that you present your body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, your reasonable service."

III. In not obeying the gospel, you are guilty of a great sin against the Holy Ghost, who makes known to you the truth concerning Jesus. Observe, I say, a sin against the Holy Ghost, not "THE sin." This consists in maliciously ascribing the miracles of Christ to Satanic agency. (Comp. Mark iii. 28—30.) But besides this sin, which is not yours, there are other sins against the Holy Ghost. The apostle describes unbelief as "doing despite to the Spirit of grace," Heb. x. 29; and this is the guilt which I must endeavour to discover to you. The peculiar relation of the Holy Spirit to the administration of the kingdom of heaven, is one of special grace. The designation of the gospel as "the ministration of the Spirit," is amply justified by the facts of the

case ; and unbelief derives one of its highest aggravations from this source. *The Holy Spirit indited the testimony.* Apostles and prophets spake and wrote as the Holy Spirit dictated. Even Jesus himself is said to have been anointed with the Spirit, to make known the will of God, and to preach the gospel unto men. They who read the Holy Scriptures are required to regard that which is written as what "the Spirit saith unto the churches." In an important sense, then the Spirit is the author of the gospel. Again, *the highest attestations of the gospel are those which the Holy Spirit has given.* The miracles of the first ages were the "gifts of the Holy Ghost," his witness to the gospel, Acts v. 32. The verification of Old Testament prophecy in the facts of Christ's history, and the immediate results of his sacrifice, are also said to be "the witness to us, which the Holy Ghost giveth," Heb. x. 11—18. Nor must we except from the same honour, the experience of believers, who in the filial disposition enjoy his "witness with their spirits that they are the children of God," Rom. viii. 15—17 ; and who testify to his aid, as they draw nigh unto God in prayer, instructing their ignorance, and "making intercession for them with groanings which cannot be uttered," Rom. viii. 26. Yea, more ; to what source but the accompanying influences of the Holy Spirit, are to be referred all the effects which the ministration of the gospel produces upon yourself? Did not Stephen charge the unbelieving Jews with "resisting the Holy Ghost," when they began to struggle against their secret convictions, and to "resist the wisdom and the spirit by

which he spake?" Acts vii. 51. Upon the same principle, you are chargeable with the same sin. When your attention is fixed on the truth; when you are compelled to yield assent to its appeals; when your sins are brought to your remembrance; when something like doubt and hesitation as to the course you shall adopt, springs up within your breast; when your duty is urged upon you, and you feel the force of those persuasive motives by which the truth is sustained; and then, set yourselves in opposition thereto, and strive against your convictions of what is right, and labour to find excuses for continuing in your former sins, what is this but to "resist the Holy Ghost?" Is not this to "do despite unto the Spirit of grace?"—to offer unto Him a flagrant insult, and to set yourself in opposition to his love, in the sweet influences of his truth?—This is the guilt which you contract by refusing to obey the gospel. You trifle with that revelation of mercy which the Spirit has given, and which he so peculiarly attests and seals. You deny to the truth, the importance which he attaches to it. You quench the rising flame of love to Christ, to holiness, to heaven, just as it is being enkindled in your heart. O what tenderness of compassion, what benevolence of purpose, what disinterestedness of effort for your good, does this "love of the Spirit" imply! I would that you would yield to it! "It is not a vain thing; it is even your life." God's Spirit will not always strive with you. Why will you provoke him to depart from you? Let me entreat you the rather to listen to his teaching; to deal tenderly with his suggestions; to yield

yourself to his influences. His grace it is which assures you of everlasting life.

“ Seize the kind promise while it waits,
And march to Zion’s heavenly gates ;
Believe, and take the promised rest ;
Obey, and be for ever blest.”

IV. Another view of the guilt of unbelief is this ; it is a sin against your own soul. Self-love is an essential principle of your nature, and it is given you to save you from the neglect of your own interests. But you unhappily confine your attention to those interests which are of a merely temporary and worldly character. You allow yourself to be easily affected by sensible objects ; but you do not seriously look at those which are spiritual and eternal. The most important part of your nature gains from you an inferior degree of regard ; yea, it scarcely engages a passing thought, or awakens a momentary anxiety. Occasionally indeed, it does much more than this ; and the condition and prospects of your soul render you for a season truly unhappy. But to neglect the soul is still your object ; and to find an excuse for postponing attention to its claims, your first solicitude. You may not exactly mean it, but your refusal to obey the gospel, is a practical denial of the claims of your soul. Let me gain your attention to this point.

Your continued rejection of Christ, or which is the same thing, your delayed submission to him, is a sad abuse of your intelligent and moral nature. Your condition as a man and a sinner, accountable to God, and appointed to live for ever,

is plainly shown you, and your duty and privilege are as plainly pointed out. The first claims upon you are unquestionably those of your Maker. Your position in his sight, and your prospects for eternity, are to you of paramount importance. You are required to give yourself to the deliberate investigation of divine truth, as it is embodied in the Holy Scriptures ; and are assured for your encouragement, that every thing is contained therein which is necessary to guide you in the path of everlasting happiness. You are cautioned against the neglect of this duty, by the strongest statements as to your entire dependence upon the sovereign will of God, and the exclusive claims of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You are specially fitted for this effort by the faculties with which God has endowed you. The spiritual themes and exalted objects of religion demand, and deserve this attention ; they are alone able to satisfy the cravings of your immortal mind ; whilst the mercy that breathes in all that is written, and adapts itself to every diversity of your condition, and the utmost exigencies of your moral misery, ought to be more than sufficient to command your prompt, devout, and entire obedience. To occupy yourself with the groveling things of sense and time, to the neglect of things spiritual and eternal ; to be filled with self to the exclusion of God, to avert your eyes from Jesus whose grace alone can make your spirits happy, is surely to abuse the powers with which you are gifted. Thus to act, is to lower yourself in the scale of being, to neglect your first duties, to " follow after lying vanities, and forsake your own mercies." The effect cannot be otherwise than to degrade and

debase the soul ; to enfeeble its efforts at contemplation ; to blunt its susceptibility of moral feeling ; and to bind it down to earth as with an adamantine chain.

But what an utter disregard of the claims of the soul does your conduct display ! Endeavour to estimate the value of the soul, and its just claims upon your supreme attention. Its spiritual nature shows it to be an emanation from God who is a " Spirit," and gives to it a striking resemblance to its Maker. The order of its operations resembles that of the one Infinite Mind. It is capable of receiving knowledge, and of choosing its course of action. It can soar high, and dig deep among the works of God. Abstract questions of physical and metaphysical science, lie within the range of its investigation and research. Its susceptibilities of feeling are most exquisite. How greatly can it enjoy ; and how fearfully can it suffer ! The soul is a moral being ; accountable to God in all things ; formed for his glory, and bound to obey his will. But, alas ! it is guilty ; and by reason of sin exposed to the wrath and curse of Almighty God. Yes, your soul is in danger of sinking into everlasting perdition. It must live for ever ; and its immortality must be inconceivably wretched, unless its guilt be forgiven, and its character renewed. But the greatest proof of its value is the price that has been paid for its redemption. The Son of God, manifest in the flesh, offered himself a sacrifice, to put away its guilt and effect its salvation. Your soul is yourself. Your escape from eternal misery is possible. Jesus Christ has died to save sinners. You are required to repent of sin, and

seek salvation as "the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." But you are neglecting this "great salvation." You are treating the affairs of your soul, and the unutterable realities of eternity, as things of nought. You are delaying to do that "one thing" upon which your own true happiness depends. You are trifling with one of the noblest works of God; and this under circumstances which aggravate the guilt a thousand fold. Stop! O stop! and consider what you are doing. "What shall you be profited, if you shall gain the whole world, and lose your own soul? Or, what will you give in exchange for your soul," in that day when its final condition must be fixed? How just will be all the misery which such guilt entails!

V. Your conduct in not embracing and serving Christ, has the yet further guilt of inflicting a serious injury upon others.

You have beloved relatives, dear to you as your own life; a wife, a brother, a sister, a parent, a child, who are still uninterested in the privileges and prospects of true religion. Your unbelief disqualifies you from becoming the instrument of their salvation, and may even be the occasion of their condemnation. You cannot pray for them, nor instruct them that they may be saved. Your example does not point out to them "the path of life." Your hearts do not meet theirs in holy and affectionate influences for their eternal good; on the contrary, they find in your neglect of vital godliness an excuse for their own merely nominal Christianity. One is hardened in his sin, and another is fortified in his proud self-righteousness; and all are kept in the downward road. If they

perish, at whose hand will their blood be required?

You have neighbours and friends, companions and associates, apprentices and servants, labourers dependent on you for support, or children committed for a season to your superintendence and instruction. How can you be a blessing to these, whilst you continue to be a curse to yourself? Your influence over them might be inconceivably valuable; but how can it be so whilst it is unsanctified by obedience to God? Of what avail would it be that you should warn these to flee from sin, or exhort them to walk in "the good and the right way," whilst you remain in the "broad road" yourself? How many sinners your example is ruining, the day will declare.

But wider still does the mischief spread. Your unbelief associates you with the conspiracy of devils and the vilest of mankind, against the claims of God, and the order and happiness of the universe. The only difference between you and them is this, that you are a concealed foe to the cause of righteousness and truth; whilst their enmity is avowed, and their opposition manifest unto all. If they are the positive occasions of dishonour to God, you are negatively so. No more than they, do you submit to the high authority of your Maker. Is God unrighteous who ranks you amongst his foes, and measures your guilt by the same rule?

What, then, is your guilt? Human language must ever fail to describe its aggravations. You disobey God, and "make him a liar." You "tread under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified

an unholy thing." "You do despite unto the Spirit of grace." You are destroying yourself, and bringing a curse upon others. And all this because you will not "submit yourself unto the righteousness of God." Your sin is wilful and deliberate; it is against light and knowledge, against convictions and resolutions. You dare not attempt to justify it; yet you seek to excuse it, that you may continue in it. How long will you thus blacken your character, and ruin your happiness? Let Jesus standing on the Mount of Olives, declare to you your guilt. Read it in his tears, and hear it in his words. If these will not move you, how can I hope to do so? "He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known at least in this thy day the things that make for thy peace." This is your mercy; it is not yet added, "But now they are hid from thine eyes." Yet it is said to you, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." It can cleanse even yours; but do not now despise and rebel. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near."

VII.

THE DANGER OF THE NOMINAL CHRISTIAN.

In reading the Old Testament, have you not often thought, that if you had been placed in the circumstances of the Israelites in the wilderness, you would have been numbered with the few who remained faithful amidst the faithless? You have

commended the fidelity of Caleb and Joshua ; you have admired the meekness of Moses ; and you have felt constrained to justify God in the punishment of the disobedient. But has it never occurred to you, that the parallel between the unbelieving Jew and the unbelieving Christian is very close, and the resemblance very striking ? The apostle Paul illustrates the case of those who come short of the kingdom of heaven by the history of the Israelites, who came out of Egypt and fell short of Canaan. In both cases, a gracious promise of future good is presented ; in both cases, aggravated guilt is incurred ; and in both cases a fearful condemnation ensues. The principle of the disobedience is also the same—unbelief. The difference lies here. As the object of gracious promise under the gospel is infinitely more valuable than the promise of Canaan ; and the provocation which unbelief now implies, is on this account vastly greater ; so the guilt, which is now incurred is more aggravated, and the danger to which unbelief exposes is infinitely more awful. “ We see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it,” Heb. iii. 19 ; iv. 1. “ He that despised Moses’s law died without mercy, in the mouth of two or three witnesses. *Of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing ; and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace ?*” Heb. x. 28, 29. This danger appertains to the state of unbelief in every case.

The guilt may admit of some slight shades or varieties ; but it is essentially the same, wherever the heart is not subjected "to the obedience of Christ." It is of little moment that you are not an infidel, if you remain a practical unbeliever and a merely nominal Christian. As such I speak to you. O that I could so depict the danger of your condition as to constrain you *now* to "yield yourself unto God !"

Your present state is a state of condemnation. Thus saith the gracious Saviour himself, "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God," John iii. 18. The gospel of Jesus Christ is to you the law of God. You are placed under it as a government of mercy ; in which the way of salvation is shown to you, and your duty is plainly declared. To submit yourself unto "God in Christ," is now made your first obligation ; in other words, to repent, and exercise faith towards the divine Mediator, is your first duty. All needful and desirable means of knowledge and life are granted to you ; and at this point of believing submission, your spirit is tried, your character is developed, and your state before God determined. If when you read, and hear, and learn the will of God, you do it, the promised blessing is yours ; you "pass from death unto life." Your previous exposure to everlasting misery, as the just consequence of your sins, is removed ; the mercy of God reaches you ; your sins are forgiven you for Christ's sake, and you come into a state of life. You then enter upon a new life, spiritual in its nature, holy in its character, and everlasting in its duration.

DANGER.

Like the condemned criminal, when he is pardoned and discharged, you come forth from your prison house to serve God "in newness of life." Your state is now a state of life. The promise of eternal life is yours; and you have the earnest of its enjoyment in the holy desires, and purposes, and efforts of your nature to serve and please God, which are the very essence of it. Then, when you believe, the word of Christ is verified unto you, which he spake to the woman of Samaria: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life," John iv. 14. But what is your condition, if when the requirements of the gospel are addressed to you, you do not obey them? Jesus says, "You are condemned already." You need not wait the disclosures of eternity to show you your condition, it is obvious at once. You have refused to submit to the prescribed terms of the commandment which you would not obey. You are and are consequently condemned by the commandment exposed to all the legitimate consequences of your unbelief. Your *first* refusal to "obey the gospel of God" placed you in a state of condemnation. The sentence was then recorded. In mercy to you, the execution of it is still delayed, and thus time and place for repentance are afforded you, as the overtures of reconciliation are repeated. But it is not repealed, is true, indeed, that it *may* be; but it *will not*, except you change your course, and submit to the authority of God. This forbearance of God is designed to secure your salvation; and it is dan-

gerous to presume upon it. You have no security that it will be prolonged. The day of grace will close. The patience of God will not always wait. And how uncertain is the tenure by which you hold your continued opportunities! Your life is rapidly wearing away. Its close may be the most sudden and unexpected. You have no power to "retain the spirit;" no, not for a moment, when God shall require it. If He speak, you die. If he look, you are not. If he call, you are at his bar. What a solemn thought, that you are not ready! You are in a state of condemnation. Your sins are not pardoned. Your peace with God is not made. Jesus is not your Saviour and your Lord. Your privileges are not improved. Your judgment is already recorded. One opportunity more is *now* granted. It may be the last. "O consider your dangerous position;" and "flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope that is set before you." You stand on the brink of a precipice, where all around you may be improved to secure your safety, but where there is nothing before you but "the bottomless pit." "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?"

" Now, even now, to Jesus fly,
Whose powerful arm can save."

Your hope is that your life will yet be spared. Hence you calculate upon future opportunities, and purpose to make sure work for eternity on some coming day. *This delay to repent greatly increases the difficulty of your salvation.* Days may increase; sabbaths may be multiplied; years may yet be added to your life; means and opportunities may yet be given. But every day's

continuance in your present state of unbelief, augments the danger of your condition, and the difficulty of your salvation. Whilst you foster the spirit of pride and self-complacency, which keeps you from humbling yourself at the feet of Jesus ; which leads you to boast of your religious formalities and supposed virtues ; which, at the least, furnishes you with an excuse for postponing the surrender to God, which the gospel requires, and your own immortal welfare demands ; this spirit is constantly gathering strength, and each day becomes more and more impatient of control. The loftier and steeper the mountain you have climbed, the more difficult it is to descend. But the "spirit of faith" is humility ; and the salvation of the soul can only be secured by the renunciation of self, and a thorough submission to the word of God. Again, your present state is one which tends to repress inquiry, and to promote contentment with mere generalities in religion. You think that you are right ; if not for eternity, at least for the present. This produces satisfaction with your present condition. You do not think of inquiring further. Your mind is not open to conviction. In the ordinary affairs of life, it is always a serious evil to repress inquiry, and not to look around and seek acquaintance with probable consequences and results. How much more important is this in the affairs of the life to come ! For want of this it is, that you are content to admire the mere externals of Christianity, and rest in these ; regarding the interior of religion—its spiritual character, its fervent piety, its energetic devotedness, its lively hopes—as a peculiarly eminent measure of excellence,

belonging to the few, instead of that which all ought to attain and might possess. The longer you continue under this illusion, the more powerfully will it bind your spirit, and hide the truth from your view. Satan knows well that you are safe in his hands, so long as you allow yourself to rest satisfied with things as they are, and to inquire no further. You may be as rigid as you please in attention to the forms of godliness, *he* will not disturb you, unless you begin to inquire concerning its power.—The next step to this, is a state of carnal security and delusive hope. When once you have allowed yourself to settle down in this satisfaction with outward forms, it becomes quite natural to rest in these, and desire nothing beyond. The ignorance of the things of God, which multitudes discover who have lived all their days amidst the light of the gospel, is truly affecting. They do not seem to understand even “the first principles of the oracles of God.” Alas! they are secure in the mere “form of godliness.” An awful illustration of this truth is supplied by the fact, that a comparatively small number of those who have long sat under the gospel, are ever brought to serious concern and decided conversion to God. The light is before their minds, but not in their hearts. Take heed that this be not your case. Remember, that the divine Saviour himself has pointed out to you this danger. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day.” Mark this; “*in that day*,” saying, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?

and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity," Matt. vii. 21—23. Thus does your continuance in unbelief tend to confirm the mind in impenitence, and to steel the heart against all the appeals of the truth; so that although the means of knowledge may remain with you, you are in danger of becoming altogether unsusceptible of holy impressions, and of losing your way to heaven amidst the very light which marks it out to you. This was the case with some of the Jews, who heard Christ's discourses, and cavilled, and doubted, and hesitated, and refused to believe, until his word had no place in them; and they sought to kill him, John viii. 37. Do not so trifle with your soul, by thus hardening your heart against the truth. Why should you "crucify to yourself the Son of God afresh," and render your salvation impossible by your continued unbelief? You do not wish to perish eternally. Your deliberate purpose is not taken in favour of everlasting destruction. Why, then, are you so infatuated as to render this issue certain through your careless inattention, your self-righteous pride, your love of sin, or your impenitent procrastination? The salvation of your soul is precious, far above rubies is its price. "Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in the latter end."

To these considerations there must be added another: *your present state of separation from Christ, will, if you repent not, issue in everlasting separation from him, in that world where "there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."*

The gospel is the last dispensation of divine mercy, and its decision upon your character and state at death is irreversible. As the righteous have the promise of life everlasting, so the wicked shall "go away into everlasting punishment." As "there will be no more curse" to disturb the happiness of the former, so there will be no renewal of mercy to dissipate or alleviate the misery of the latter. "He who is holy will be holy still; and he who is unrighteous will be unrighteous still." To argue that God is too merciful to execute the threatenings he has denounced, is as absurd as it is wicked; and to dream of a universal respite and salvation, is plainly contrary to the most obvious declarations of holy Scripture. The degrees of punishment with which the disobedient and the ungodly will be visited in the state of final retribution, will vary according to the means of knowing the will of God, and the inducements to obey it with which they are here favoured. "That servant who knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes," Luke xii. 47, 48. This, however, can afford but small relief to *you*. Where are means and advantages superior to those which you enjoy? If to any, surely to you, belongs "the greater condemnation." "It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for you." To "have his portion appointed with the unbelievers," is the fiercest doom which even Jesus himself, to whom all judgment is committed, could assign to the unfaithful servant, Luke xii. 46.

Nor can this doom be long delayed. The short period of life's probationary course once closed, the punishment of unbelief immediately follows. Nor are you certain that it can be averted even now, but by timely repentance. Your state is already one of condemnation, "because you have not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Your only hope is in the long-suffering of your Maker. O that you would now account his long-suffering to be salvation, and "flee from the wrath to come!" The impending consequences of unbelief are too awful to be adequately described. If the loss that is implied in "coming short" of the kingdom were all that is threatened, this is inconceivably great. It is the loss of God, and every token of his favour; the loss of heaven and all its joys; the loss of all good and agreeable society; the loss of all ease and hope for ever. But, alas! for you, if you continue in unbelief, this is far, very far from all that is implied in your future punishment. You must calculate on the endurance of actual sufferings, as well as on the absence of every good. The Bible employs the strongest figurative expressions to describe the misery of hell. It is "*darkness*," "*outer darkness*," "*chains of darkness*," "*blackness of darkness*," Matt. viii. 12. 2 Pet. ii. 4. Jude 13. Darkness without light, and aggravated by the light to which it succeeds. Darkness "that may be felt," entailing all the horrors of the Egyptian darkness, in frightful restlessness, and gloomy solitude, and painful desolation, and unavailing sighs for relief, and this "for ever." A state of "darkness," where deeds of darkness, from which you now shrink with

horror, will be unceasingly perpetrated all around you, and there will be no escape. It is "*fire*," to imitate the burning severity of that anguish which will there rend the spirit, and distress the body; ever consuming, but never consumed; a "fire that is not quenched." "*A furnace of fire*," Matt. xiii. 42. The image is perhaps borrowed from "the burning fiery furnace" of the book of Daniel; and teaches us that even this was but an emblem of the "strange punishment" of the ungodly. "*A lake of fire*," "*the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone*," Rev. xxi. 8. A burning volcano, where fiery billows roll, and deep convulsions roar, and shake and agitate the sea of fire. "The smoke of their torment goeth up for ever and ever," who are cast into the lake of fire. They "*suffer the vengeance of eternal fire*," Jude 7; the punishment inflicted by an angry God. This is the most terrific idea of all. "God is love." There is no undue heat about his anger. It is holy and righteous indignation. But what must the suffering be, when all *his* vast resources are brought to bear upon the punishment of sin? "Who shall dwell with the devouring fire?" Who shall abide the everlasting burnings?"—Besides these and similar figurative descriptions, calculated to impress the heart of the most hardened, the Scriptures, with equal mercy, suggest *various sources of future misery*. The *sin which they indulge* will render men their own tormentors there. "They shall utterly perish in their own corruption," 2 Peter ii. 12. Their own moral character will, in itself and its effects, constitute much of their misery. Sinful desires entail misery even here, and when

their gratification has yielded its utmost delight; how much more in that world where, with augmented strength, there are no opportunities of gratification! The more "the passions burn and rage" there, the more bitter the misery, as they recoil, in painful disappointment, upon the man who is the subject of them, and make him their victim.—*Remorse* is bitter there. O, with how "many stripes" will you be smitten, if unhappily it should once be said to you in the world to come, "Son, remember," Luke xvi. 25. Remember thy father's instructions, and thy mother's tears; the kind expostulations of thy friend, and the fervent pleadings of thy minister; the reproofs of thy conscience, and the strivings of God's Holy Spirit. Remember thy Bible, thy sabbaths, thy privileges, thy opportunities, thy convictions, thy resolutions. Remember thy carelessness, thy pride, thy trifling, thy fatal procrastination, and impenitent unbelief.—Another source of misery is suggested, when you are told that you will be sent to the place "prepared for the devil and his angels," Matt. xxv. 41. What stores of "fiery darts" "the wicked one" has yet in reserve for the unbelievers, no heart can conceive. In what new lights can he set forth the guilt of rejecting offered mercy? What bitter reproaches can he heap upon those who, against all the remonstrances of heavenly truth, suffered themselves to be "led captive by him at his will!" How will he exult over them, and taunt them with vile invectives, as he binds them yet the faster in his slavish chains!—*The society of wicked and wretched men*, will yet further aggravate the woe. There is a total absence of every thing

like confidence in that world. No love, no sincerity, no faith is there. Selfishness, entire and absolute, reigns in every breast. No sufferer has a friend there, into whose ear he can pour the tale of his misery. All are enemies and deceivers, employing themselves in mutual recriminations, especially towards those whose opportunities of escape from eternal misery were most abundant. "Art thou also become like unto us?" Isa. xiv. 10, is the salutation which will mock *your* misery, if you allow your unbelief to become your ruin.—But above all, there is *the wrath of God, and the bitterness of eternal despair*. The peculiar nature of those inflictions which proceed immediately from the righteous hand of God, as distinguished from those which may be traced to secondary sources, it is impossible fully to understand. To see sin as it is, and yet find no escape from it; to feel the equity of your doom, and yet perpetually rebel against it; to perceive the excellence of God, and yet to hate him, are ideas sufficiently intelligible to suggest, in some degree, what must be the anguish of a heart made to feel all that is terrible in the displeasure of the Lord. And to hear, without ceasing, the knell of lost souls proclaiming,—“for ever,”—“for ever,”—“for ever,” may well shut up the door of hope, and seal the wretchedness of despair.

Not in anger, but in mercy, are these disclosures made to you concerning the future punishment of the ungodly. You are thus forewarned, that you may “escape the damnation of hell.” Do not think it strange that “the unbelieving” are classed with “the fearful and the abominable, with murderers and idolaters,” Rev. xxi. 8, in

exposure to everlasting misery. Unbelief is all sins in one; and the higher your elevation in point of privileges, the deeper must be your fall, if you persevere in the misimprovement of them. Many other sins might have been charged upon the Jews who came short of Canaan, but unbelief is the one referred to as the procuring cause of their exclusion; and so it is with reference to the Canaan above. Then be intreated to "believe with the heart unto righteousness." The throne of grace is now open to you. God is still "waiting to be gracious." Jesus is still there to intercede on your behalf. All the promises yet suggest to you their fulness of encouragement. It is not yet too late. Hear the voice of mercy, and submit yourself. "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" "Flee from the wrath to come." "Give glory unto the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness." "O taste and see that the Lord is good." "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

VIII.

THE DUTY OF THE NOMINAL CHRISTIAN.

Is this my danger? Am I thus guilty in "despising the word of the Lord?" "What doth the Lord my God require of me?" Your duty has been frequently set before you. It has been im-

plied, and even enforced in this little volume. But I will endeavour to set it forth in order to you. Give me your attention ; and be filled with a sincere desire to do the will of God, and by his blessing you shall understand it. The apostle James exactly meets your case, and sums up your duty in one verse of his epistle, " Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves," Jas. i. 22. Obedience to this general direction implies, however, obedience to several more particular ones ; which I will now bring under your notice in the order in which they naturally address themselves to your present state of mind. May the Holy Spirit attend the truth with saving power !

I. "*Consider your ways.*" The capacity to consider is the highest distinction of your nature. You are not impelled to action by mere instinct, nor driven by stern and irresistible necessity. Allied to the noblest creatures which God has made, you are governed by motives, and you exercise a free and unbiassed choice. You can reflect on the past, and derive from it important lessons of wisdom and holiness. You can anticipate the future, as its high probabilities are suggested by the character of the past, and its solemn realities are set forth in the word of God. With equal facility and effect, you can realize your present position. The means of information are in your hands ; and the fact of your accountability to God is pressed upon your attention by all that is within, and all that is around you. Give yourself to reflection. You consider the contingencies of your worldly business. You inquire for the best plans of action. You reflect on what is

due to your health, to your family, to your reputation amongst men. Are not the concerns of your soul of vastly greater moment? Has not God supreme claims upon your regard? Is not eternity of unutterable importance? Do you not agree that religion is the "one thing needful?" Is not life uncertain, and death at hand? Do you not lie at God's mercy, and have you not strong convictions of the necessity of an interest in that mercy? Let me earnestly beg of you to retire, and set apart one short hour for serious and intelligent consideration. Do this at once. Bring yourself into the presence of your Maker. Deal faithfully with yourself upon this, the greatest of all questions. Ask what you have done, where you are going, and where you stand. In the full light of all the knowledge you possess, examine your present character, and see what are its leading principles. Try to understand the guilt and danger of disobedience to the gospel of God; and endeavour to obtain that simplicity of mind which will prepare you to judge and act aright. Now that your attention is awakened, seize and improve the moments of mercy. For the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for your own soul's sake, "stand still and consider!" Take not another step in the journey of life, until you have thus sanctified your intelligent nature to the due consideration of its condition, its advantages, its responsibilities, and its duty. Will you do this? Is your purpose now taken? Are you already laying aside this book to set about the fulfilment of it? Then let me offer to you a second advice illustrative of your duty.

II. "*Search the Scriptures.*" Take your

Bible with you into your retirement. It is the word of God, and contains all the information which you can require, on every point connected with your salvation. The proofs of its divine authority need not be referred to ; you know them, and acknowledge their force. The unparalleled grace which breathes in every page of the volume, greatly strengthens its claims upon your study ; whilst your entire dependence on the will of God for the hope of salvation, loudly calls you to avail yourself of the means of knowledge which he has given you. This " word of truth " is, moreover, the grand instrument by which the Holy Spirit works, in carrying out the purposes of redeeming love, and the great means of leading sinners to Christ. " Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Use your Bible then in such way, as its peculiar relation to God and to yourself demands. Give to it a simple-hearted and serious attention. Lay aside every prejudice, and open your mind to the clear light of its instructions, and the full force of its divine influences. Cherish the purpose, so reasonable and so necessary, of abiding by its decisions upon your case, and of acting upon its directions, without hesitation or delay. Nothing less than this can prove you to be sincere in your desire to obtain eternal life. Proceed thus, and you can scarcely fail of your object. True, the volume is large, and to read it through requires considerable time and repeated opportunities ; some parts are difficult, and, like the higher branches of natural science, require great proficiency in what has gone before ; and, there is nothing like systematic arrangement, to guide and help research. But there

are passages which cannot fail at once to arrest and fix the attention of the sincere inquirer ; passages which enter simply and fully into the great question, "What shall I do to be saved?" and leave nothing to be desired beyond what they teach. Such, for example, is the record of our Lord's interview with Nicodemus, in John iii. Open your Bible at this place. Study carefully, and with a sincere desire to profit, the 14th, 15th, and 16th verses of that chapter. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Let the circumstances of the Israelites, bitten by the serpents, and perishing in agony, instruct you as to your own condition before God. You are a sinner, unhappy, because you are unholy ; and "ready to perish," because you have not submitted yourself unto God. Let the elevated serpent of brass, fix your thoughts on the divine appointment of a Saviour for your souls, in the person of his own Son ; and let the claim upon the believing look of the wounded Jew, show you the nature and the obvious necessity of the gospel claim upon you. Let the implied alternatives of obedience and neglect, teach you your present duty and privilege, and urge you to the right course. And let the powerful motives implied in the 16th verse, find their way to your heart. How disinterested and vast the love of God in the gift of his Son—the gift of his Son for you, and for your salvation—

to sufferings the most intense, and a death the most cruel and ignominious, in order that you may live through him ! How large and free the offer of mercy which is addressed to you for Christ's sake ! How transcendently important the contemplated result ! " that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Read on, ver. 17—21, and observe with what earnestness and kindness this arrangement of God's mercy is pressed upon your attention ; and " see that you refuse not him that speaketh." Why do you hesitate ? What mean those misgivings, and that effort to find an excuse for continuing your neglect of the gospel ? Your duty is to

III. "*Lay aside every weight.*" You can do nothing to purchase salvation ; it is " the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." But you can put away from you those occasions of self-gratification, which now supply you with an excuse for neglecting the pursuit of it. Having discovered the " one pearl of great price," the merchantman " went and sold all that he had and bought it," Matt. xiii. 45, 46. Paul " counted all things but loss for Christ," Phil. iii. 7, 8, when he felt his need of salvation, and saw his absolute dependence upon God's mercy, however he had esteemed them " gain to him" before. You must follow the guidance of divine truth, and " go and do likewise." To cherish your own pride, to cling to your own righteousness, and to continue to boast of your pious descent and your numerous privileges, is to disregard his teaching, in whose hands alone is your salvation ; for he says, " If any man will come after me,

let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me," Matt. xvi. 24. To hesitate, because of the wishes of friends or companions, is to lose Christ; for he has plainly told you, "Whosoever loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me," Matt. x. 37. If there is some sin from which you will not part, some sacrifice which you will not make, some known duty which you will not perform, you must be content still to "come short of the kingdom of God." Jesus Christ demands entire and universal submission to his terms of mercy, and can abate nothing of his claims. He can pity your weakness, and will help your infirmities, but he must have sincere acquiescence in the proposals of his grace. The spirit of faith is a disposition to obey in all things the gospel of God. So long as you hesitate upon any one point, so long is your salvation hindered, and your soul in jeopardy. You must disentangle yourself from "every weight," if you would acceptably "look unto Jesus." This is your present duty,—to cherish a thoroughly submissive state of mind. You will find difficulties. But are you sincere? You are not so, whilst you are unwilling to part with all for Christ. No mental reservations can avail you. The Saviour searches the heart. He cannot alter his terms. Your immortal happiness can be secured only by surrendering yourself wholly unto Him. What then is your duty? Is it reasonable to expect salvation whilst you live in sin, and love the world, and seek the honour that cometh from men? Is it such a return that the love of God requires? Is Jesus Christ the minister of sin? Procrastination is continued rebellion. Every new refusal

to submit, no matter upon what ground, is a new act of unbelief, with increased aggravations, and augmented guilt. It renders more difficult your purposed surrender to the Saviour; it binds more closely around you the bands that entangle you, and exposes to a more fearful doom. Make it then your present business to "lay aside every weight;" to bring "every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ;" and take heed that you

IV. "*Quench not the Spirit.*" You have now some convictions of your duty. You feel that you are not safe for eternity; or, at least, you see that there is room for doubt about it. Your impressions vary as to the degree of influence and power which they possess. But the subject of your salvation is before you, and you cannot divest yourself of some sense of its importance. If at times your conscience is more easy, it is soon as unhappy as before. The various motives which are brought before you, have produced a measure of serious thoughtfulness. You do not wish to lose your soul; on the contrary, you have a desire for its salvation. But you are hesitating as to the terms, or the time of submission unto God. Meanwhile you are urged by all the gracious considerations which the gospel of Christ suggests, to "lay aside every weight," and to yield yourself at once to the disposal of the Saviour. Stifle not the convictions which are thus made upon you. The mercy of God is very great in thus striving with you. Let "the love of Christ constrain you." Let "the terrors of the Lord persuade you." Let the necessities of your own case impel you. Let the hopes of the

gospel, hopes full of immortality, stimulate you. Let the danger of "quenching the Spirit" press heavily upon you. Do not provoke him to say of you, "He is joined to idols, let him alone." Think how greatly, and how long, he has borne with you. Your present convictions bring you near to happiness and God. Put not away from you the word of life. Reject not the counsel of God to your own destruction. Why should you stand at the very threshold of the kingdom, where you look within and see all the glory of the place, and where you are compelled to admit that the participation of it is your "everlasting life," and yet be deprived of all by refusing to enter? Again, the Saviour calls to you by his word, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me," Rev. iii. 20. Again, then, I say unto you, trifle not with your convictions. "Quench not the Spirit." Let not Jesus again depart, lest it be in anger, and he return no more. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." Be persuaded then to

V. "*Repent.*" Change your mind in reference to the great subject of religion; and let the truth operate within you to produce a corresponding change of disposition and conduct. The present state of your feelings is favourable to such change, and advancing towards it. Those views of sin, of yourself, of God and of his claims, of Jesus and his salvation; of eternity and its unchanging realities, which the Holy Spirit has furnished in the Bible, are those of truth and soberness. The more closely you examine th

the more clearly you will perceive their reasonableness and their entire accordance with truth and reality ; and the adoption of sentiments, in themselves true, cannot fairly be charged with the want of sobriety, with extravagance, or enthusiasm. The command to "repent," is an exhortation to forsake the false views which you have hitherto held on the most important of all topics, and to adopt those which bear the stamp of infallible truth. If this change be one which leads you to embrace sentiments directly opposed to those you before held, this is of no moment. You will have truth on your side, and truth is unchanging. But it is a change of sentiments which must lead to a practical result, and which will involve a corresponding change of character and conduct ; and this it is which stumbles you. Let me ask why it does this ? If the light of natural science should teach you that owing to the prevalence of wrong views, you have altogether mismanaged yourself as to the health of some vital function of your animal system, would you consider it to be either unreasonable or disgraceful, if your subsequent course should present a character exactly the opposite of the former ? Is it then either more unreasonable, or more disgraceful, to effectuate such a change in order to the health of your soul, and the happiness of your everlasting existence ? If sin be the greatest evil, why not hate it, and oppose it ? If God be the first and the best of all beings, why not centre your supreme affections in him, and offer to him your best services according to his will ? If there be no way to heaven but that which the gospel marks out, why should you be ashamed or afraid to walk in

it? If truth and holiness are of any value, impenitence is a great sin. Be thankful, therefore, for any degree of light which the truth has shed on your mind in reference to religious objects. "Whilst you have light, walk in the light, that you may be a child of light." Cherish now that deep humiliation of soul, and self-loathing, to which these discoveries naturally lead. Let your guilt become a yet heavier burden upon your conscience; and your desire to be delivered from it increase tenfold. Thus saith the Lord, "Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth; wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye," Ezek. xviii. 31, 32. "Sanctify yourselves, and be ye holy: for I am the Lord your God. And ye shall keep my statutes, and do them: I am the Lord who sanctify you," Lev. xx. 7, 8. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out," Acts iii. 19. Does "godly sorrow," then, fill your heart? Is it your purpose to seek the Lord? Why do you tarry? "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," John i. 29. And,

VI. "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.*" He is the way to the Father. "Clothed in a body like our own," "he now appears in the presence of God for us." As "the angel of the new covenant," "the great high priest of our profession," "he ever liveth to make intercession for all who come unto God by him." His eye is looking down upon you. His heart is filled with compassion towards you. His hands are stored with

blessings—all the blessings of pardon and salvation, which he is ready to bestow upon you. He calls you to himself. He entreats you to “look unto him, and be saved.” He assures you that “him that cometh, he will in no wise cast out.” He points you to his hands, and his feet, and his side, to show how he loves you. He reminds you of the numerous instances of his saving power, which the records of the church exhibit; the monuments of his mercy which the mansions of heaven unfold. He died in your stead; he lives for your sake. “Him the Father heareth always.” He has removed every barrier out of your way. “All power is given unto him in heaven and upon earth.” Roll your burden upon him, and he will bear it. Cast yourself at his feet, and his blood will cleanse away all your guilt. Repose in his merits, and you shall be “justified freely from all things.” Trust your souls in his hands, and you shall live for ever. Expect every spiritual influence and every gracious supply for his sake, and you shall not be disappointed. The malady of sin is healed; the yoke of Satan is broken; the exposure to divine wrath is removed, whenever a sinner believes in Jesus. The process by which the Holy Spirit leads to Christ is essentially that which the foregoing particulars have described. What encouragement then is given to you thus to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, since it is God who is working in you, to will and to do of his good pleasure.” The instrument is the truth, and the influence is divine. It is leading you to Jesus. O, do not any longer refuse and rebel. Hear his gracious voice, believe, and

live. "Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," Matt. xi. 28. Fall on your knees before him. Acknowledge the grace that calls you, and bids you welcome. This is what the gospel requires, and what the interests of your soul demand. Thus, then,

VII. "*Yield yourself unto God.*" "Faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ" is the one means of access to God, and the first expression of submission to him. With your eye fixed on the "one Mediator," confess your sins unto God. Acknowledge the guilt of your past rebellion and unbelief. Deplore the hardness of your heart, and the feebleness of your desires after God. "Looking unto Jesus," declare your sorrow for the past, and your humble purpose to walk henceforth in "newness of life." Plead "the promises of God, which are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus." Rest not until you have come nigh unto God, and have told him all that is in your heart. Wrestle fervently with him. Call him Father, and trust him with a filial love. Turn unto him with your whole heart. Low at his feet record your resolution to forsake sin, to mortify the flesh, to deny yourself, to come out from the world, to resist the devil, and to keep the commandments of God; whilst you "press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling," having your affections set upon things above, and not on things on the earth." If you still shrink from this course, because of some inward aversion to it, then, alas! it is too manifest that your heart is yet "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin;" and again I must call upon you to "con-

sider your ways," and to "flee from the wrath to come." O! must you yet be told that "there is no peace to the wicked," Isa. xlviii. 22; no salvation for the impenitent; no heaven for the unholy? But if you hang back through fear, through distrust of yourself, through an apprehension that you will fall away, and your latter end be thus worse than the beginning, I have to remind you that you are not called to this new service in your own strength; that you are not sent on this warfare at your own charges. Well might you then ask, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Your "sufficiency is of God," who has said, "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness," 2 Cor. xii. 9. Henceforth you are to live by prayer.

VIII. *"Ask, and it shall be given you."* Ask in the name of the Lord Jesus. Ask in faith, nothing doubting. Ask with simplicity of mind, and steadfastness of purpose. Ask earnestly, feeling the value of what you seek; and perseveringly, as one that can take no denial. Ask pardon for all your guilt, and strength in all your weakness. Ask "wisdom profitable to direct" in all your difficulties, and "grace to help in every time of need." Ask support under every trial, and deliverance out of all temptations. Ask to be faithful unto death, and finally to enjoy "the crown of life." God commands you to ask. Jesus encourages you to ask. The Holy "Spirit helpeth your infirmities" to ask. Angels hover around to rejoice when you ask. The whole redeemed church of God on earth and in heaven persuades you to ask. "Ask, and it shall be given you." "Faithful is he who hath promised,

who also will do it." You are not straitened in God. Be enlarged in yourself. "Pray without ceasing."

In endeavouring thus to become "a doer of the word" as distinguished from "a hearer only," guard against the insidious workings of pride. All this is necessary as means to an end; but there is nothing meritorious in it; and you must take care that you do not make a righteousness of it. Salvation is "of faith, that it might be by grace." "Eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Means are important in this as in all other departments of the divine government; but the blessing, here as every where, is from God; free, as it is undeserved, whilst certain, when it is rightly sought. Let your heart be established then to seek the Lord; and from this hour, let your solemn decision be taken, that whatsoever others do, "as for you, you will serve the Lord."

IX.

DIFFICULTIES TO BE SURMOUNTED IN COMING TO DECISION.

When the Saviour exhorts us to "strive to enter in at the strait gate," he implies that there are difficulties to be surmounted in becoming a Christian. "He knew what is in man;" and saw how violent a struggle it would require against self and sin, to secure a cordial embrace of the gospel, and a thorough obedience to him-

self. This by no means militates against the freeness of gospel mercy. Every difficulty is removed out of the way of the sinner's return to God, except those which originate with himself. God is sincere. The offers of salvation are large and free. The provision is suitable and sufficient. The encouragements to come and partake of it are the strongest which divine love can suggest, and are most openly and universally advanced. The invitations are repeated with the utmost frequency, in every conceivable variety of form; they are adapted to every diversity of case, and are urged by the most powerful arguments. Numerous examples of successful application to Christ are adduced; examples of even the very chief of sinners; whilst not one case of a contrary character can be alleged. In a word, the gate is thrown open, and all that persuasion can do to induce men to enter, is done. But "they all with one consent begin to make excuse." Every man has some objection to urge, some difficulty to start. You know that this is the truth. These difficulties vary in different individuals, both as to their particular character, and as to their degree of influence and power; but they are all found to be serious hindrances to salvation. You would be a Christian, were it not for something or other that is a difficulty to you. You are "*almost* persuaded;" still this implies reluctance at some point. There is some reason why you are not *altogether* a Christian. This reason is with yourself. "Who hath bewitched you that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been evidently set forth, crucified and slain among you?" What-

ever it is, the cause is a sinful one ; unreasonable and unholy in its aspect on God, and fearfully injurious to yourself. If this can be shown you, may I not hope that your reluctance to serve God will be overcome ? You must already have felt that many of your difficulties have been indirectly met as I have proceeded. It remains that some of the most common ones be selected, and more particularly exposed.

I. The first class of difficulties which I shall mention is those which are founded upon *the supreme claims of religion*. It is urged upon your attention as the "one thing needful." Every thing that is contrary to it, or inconsistent with it, must be abandoned for its sake. Your whole character and deportment, every social affection, and every worldly engagement, must be regulated by its principles. You must enter upon the service of God with your whole heart, and sanctify every acquisition and every talent to his glory. In a word, if you become a Christian, you must henceforth practise self-denial at every point, and spend your life on earth in preparation for eternal life in heaven. Now this is too much. There is some sin from which you cannot part. Or, there is some self-gratification which you cannot renounce. Or, there is something in the terms of acceptance with God to which you cannot submit, or some part of the obedience that God requires which you cannot render. But *are* the claims of religion too comprehensive and exclusive ? Ought you to stumble at this "stumbling stone ?" Do you act wisely in making this "a rock of offence ?" Think, for a moment, what religion is. It is right feeling and right conduct towards God, yourself,

and your fellow-men, according to the relations in which they severally stand towards you. Ought you not to be supremely and always under the influence of such a feeling? The peculiarity of its claims upon you in the gospel, arises from the fact of your sinfulness. You are naturally without religion, guilty, and exposed to punishment as a transgressor. As the result of education, or the favourable circumstances in which Providence has placed you, you may make a near approach to religion at some points; but then, this comes to pass entirely without the exercise of religious principle; and you are still very far removed from even the semblance of religion at other points, and these at least of equal importance. Who then but God shall prescribe the terms of your acceptable return to him? And is not his love in the gift of his Son more than a guarantee that he will require nothing of you which strict justice does not demand? But what is it that is more important to you than your salvation? For what are you refusing to "lay hold on eternal life?" Weigh that one thing which keeps you from Christ in the balance of truth, against the worth of your soul, the happiness of heaven, and the miseries of hell. Ask yourself whether religion can prefer any thing less than supreme claims? Do I not speak the truth when I say, that if it be not all-important, it is not important at all? Why then, when called to part with all for Christ, and give up all to God, do you reply, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" You do not deny that the claims of religion are right; then, must you not be wrong in refusing to submit to them? They are not more than right;

and were the religious principle perfect in you, you could not do more than "please God." The sincere effort to do this can yield you true happiness, and this only. "Choose that good part, which shall not be taken away from you."

II. *The pride of self-righteousness* often originates a difficulty, and keeps sinners from Christ. This originated Paul's opposition to the Saviour. This created the difficulty of the Galatians; they "sought to be justified by the law." This led to the ruin of the Jews; they went "about to establish their own righteousness." And this spirit of self-dependence, operating in a diversity of forms, still furnishes men with an excuse for "neglecting the great salvation." One pleads that he has a good heart, and another that he has done no man any harm. One is descended from a long line of pious ancestors, and adheres to the exact form of Christian profession to which he was born, and considers himself an heir to all the blessings of "the new covenant;" whilst another, under the persuasive influence of the truth, has effected a thorough reformation in his outward character, and thinks he has done enough to entitle him to the same privileges. One is so blameless that he has "kept all the commandments from his youth up," and he asks, "Wherein am I still deficient?" and another is so penitent and sorry, that he has in many things offended God, and so ready to confess it, that he cannot suppose any thing further to be required of him. The charities and good deeds of some, and the orthodox creeds and strict religious observances of others, are thought sufficient to justify them before God. Some, who affect at least to see in themselves more serious delinquen-

cies, are content to rest in the mere fact that God is merciful, without any consideration as to the mode in which his mercy may be exercised, or a single thought of the necessity of his upholding his throne in righteousness. His threatenings, according to them, are only designed to strike terror into the mind ; he is too kind and favourably disposed towards his erring creatures, ever to put them in execution. Others, again, are buoyed up with an equally vain hope founded upon the consideration of their present sufferings. These are so many, so frequent, so very heavy, that they must certainly avail to atone for any sins they may have committed. And thus, and on other similar grounds, you try to do without Christ. Or if you do not think to do without him altogether, you fancy that you need him only to make up your deficiency, when you have done the best you can. As the Jews of old "made the commandment of God of none effect through their traditions ;" so do you now make his commandment of none effect by your attempted substitution of your own righteousnesses, in the place of simple obedience to the gospel. For you, "Christ has died in vain." But are you wiser than God ? He has pronounced your salvation impossible, except as his righteousness in the forgiveness of sins is declared in the sacrifice of Christ ; how then can you hope to go to heaven some other way, or to go there at all, except in *his* way ? Is your righteousness so entire, so universal, so perfect, that God can see no flaw in it ? You know that it is not ; but it must be this, before he can accept it as the basis of your justification ; for "the thought of foolishness is sin," and "he who

offendeth in one point, is guilty of all." And as to the union of your best doings with the merits of Jesus, it is a mere subterfuge, of which in your heart you are thoroughly ashamed. It is pride that keeps you from Christ. The day is near when he will humble it and punish it, if you do not humble yourself and forsake it. Away with all these delusive vanities! Why will you erect hinderances to your own happiness? Why will you set yourself in opposition to God? Why do you thus ungratefully requite his love to you? "Why will ye die?" "God has brought near his righteousness;" why should you seek to provide another?

III. A third class of difficulties flows from *the fear of man*. "How can ye believe who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh from God only?" You would believe and obey the gospel; *but* you are ashamed to let it be known that you are a penitent sinner, reproaching all your past life, and purposing henceforth to be religious. You would obey; *but* you are afraid of the frowns of some who have heretofore looked upon you with favour, and treated you with kindness. You would obey; *but* your companions will deride you, and laugh at you, and forsake you. You would obey; *but* you must give a new character, in some respects, to your worldly business, and this will involve at least the risk of temporal loss. But what of all this? If all these individual evils should be united in your case, "what is the chaff to the wheat, saith the Lord?" "I, even I, am he that comforteth you; who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man who

shall be made as grass; and forgettest the LORD thy Maker?" Isa. li. 12. Is not *His* favour life? Is he not "able to give you much more than this," whatever it may be that you may be called to sacrifice for his sake? Do you not think that your companions will be quite as willing to part with you, as you can be to part with them? Ask of those who have gone before you, whether they did not find all these difficulties to vanish at once, when they sincerely set their hearts to seek God. But however this might be, is it a wise course which you adopt, in neglecting for such reasons the salvation of your immortal soul? What will be the value of all this opposition, in that day when you and they together shall go down to the chambers of the grave? When you stand together at the judgment seat of Christ? How will you reproach yourself in that day, with the folly and sin of hating instruction and despising reproof! What is your duty? Is it not to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness?" Then "fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell," Matt. x. 28. It is always safe to go forward in the path of duty. You may confidently trust God with your interests, when you are found uprightly doing his will. His views of what you need, may, it is true, differ from your own; but you will have all that you really need, whilst the friendship of God will far more than compensate for all the loss of human friendships and favours. Act then a wise and holy part, and "yield yourself unto God."

IV. Perhaps you are held back from holy de-

cision simply by a consideration of *the novelty of the course to be pursued*. You admit that religion has claims, and that it is neither wise nor safe to neglect them ; but it is such a new path, so totally different from every thing you have before met with, that you do not know how to enter upon it. Is this any thing more than an excuse ? If it were a new path to wealth that was opening before you, would the novelty of it be sufficient to deter you from entering it ? Nay, if it had but one-tenth part the promise of certainty which the ways of truth present, would you not eagerly venture upon it ? “Be not deceived.” Let not even your own heart deceive you. Why should your soul perish ? Why should you go down to the pit with “a lie in your right-hand ?” Again I must remind you, that however numerous may be the devices in a man’s heart, “the counsel of the LORD that shall stand.” There is *one* way to heaven, and there is not another. Be persuaded, therefore, to walk in it.

V. *The pressure of worldly affairs* supplies you with an excuse for delay in this matter, and appears to you to be a serious difficulty in the way of becoming religious. Let us look at this also. The engagements of business and of social life are entangling. You feel them to be so. They fill you with innumerable and heavy anxieties. Your mind is so absorbed by them as to be almost incapable of attending to any thing else. Disappointments are often arising, which create great perplexity. The difficulty of successfully prosecuting your occupation is considerable. You have a family dependent upon you. And the conclusion to which you come is

this, that your mind is too fully occupied with worldly things, to allow of your giving to religion a proper measure of attention, and therefore it is better to let it alone, until some more convenient season. Is this conclusion justified by the circumstances of the case? If religion be of paramount importance, ought it not to obtain present attention, whatever may be the difficulty arising from worldly circumstances? What security have you that any more favourable opportunity will ever be afforded you? Be this, however, as it may, is not religion a principle of action? Is it not applicable to all cases and at all times? In what way will it hinder your worldly property? Are there not many men around you who are as fully involved in worldly business as you are, but are at the same time imbued in no small degree with the religious spirit? Does it not sanctify their worldly pursuits, and console them under their worldly trials? Are they not as prosperous as other men? Are not their families as respectably maintained? And do they not, besides, present a happy exemption from that murmuring and complaining disposition to which you are prone? Facts are stubborn things. What religion does for them, it can do for you; and what they can do under its influence, you can do also. But were there even any such peculiarity about your case as to forbid this conclusion, still are you not shut up to the obedience which the gospel requires, or the dread alternative which disobedience involves? "The friendship of the world is enmity with God," Jas. iv. 4. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," 1 John ii. 15. Yea,

what is the Christian's directory ~~in~~ on this very point? "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord," Rom. xii. 11. The gospel has plainly contemplated your case, and it requires your compliance with its claims. "Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her." If you will continue "*of the world*," you must at last be "*condemned with the world*."

VI. Your difficulties are all of them excuses. Their real object is to keep the heart from Christ, and to conceal the true occasion of your continued unbelief—"the offence of the cross." It is this which constitutes your grand "stumbling block." The doctrines of Christ are too sublime and spiritual; his precepts too pure and holy; his ordinances too simple and heavenly, to foster your pride and suit your taste. But more than all, the terms of acceptance and life are too humiliating. This is the point. Here is the secret. Is it not so? Does not every other objection resolve itself into this? "If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, thou wouldest have done it." But to "trust for life in one that died;"—this is to acknowledge your case to be so thoroughly desperate, and to cast yourself so entirely upon the mercy of God, that you cannot submit to this. Well, my fellow-immortal, what then shall be done? Your case and mine are so utterly hopeless in themselves that we can do nothing. If we think to commend ourselves unto God, we must perish. We can make no atonement for our guilt. If we should "give the

fruit of our body for the sin of our soul," it would profit us nothing. But "can we dwell with the devouring fire?" What motive, but one of pure and disinterested kindness, could actuate our Maker and Judge, when he gave his own Son to die in our room and stead? Could he not easily destroy us? Yet he still "persuades us to be reconciled unto him." He assures us that if salvation could have come by the law, Christ would not have died; that every thing which Jesus did and suffered was indispensable, in order to glorify him in the exercise of mercy; that we cannot be saved in any other way. Again, I ask, Are you wiser than God? or have you any claim upon him? Why should you reject the counsel of heavenly mercy? What profit is it, if you cherish your pride and lose your soul? What does reason, conscience, gratitude, consistency demand? Come, let us go together to the foot of the cross. It may require a violent effort to break asunder this bond of pride. But we *must* make it. Lord, help us by thine holy influence to make it now!

X.

TEMPTATIONS BY WHICH THE NOMINAL CHRISTIAN IS ASSAILED.

The claims of religion are now before you. They have gained some degree of attention, and awakened some corresponding impressions. You

are somewhat anxious about the result. But various and specious considerations are suggested to your mind, tending to keep you still from that holy and entire decision which the gospel demands. These are so many "devices of Satan," by which he is endeavouring to "take advantage of you." "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," Gal. vi. 7. To guard you against this deceptive influence is now my immediate design. Why should "the god of this world blind your eyes," that he may bind more closely around you his adamantine chains, and rob you of everlasting happiness? This is his object. He may artfully conceal it, by flattering your pride, and misrepresenting the truth; but he seeks only your destruction. Carefully he adapts his suggestions to the peculiarity of your case; and easily can he "transform himself into an angel of light;" but he is the father of lies, and the murderer of souls, notwithstanding. Look then at his representations in the light of eternal truth. Weigh them all in the balance of the sanctuary, and yield yourself to the guidance of "the Lord the Spirit." Perhaps the best way to secure you against these temptations, is to select a few of the most common ones, and show you their fallacy. All others may be tried by similar tests.

I. You are told that *nothing more is necessary than you already possess.*

I am anxious to give to this suggestion its full weight. I will therefore assume that all supposable commendations meet in your case. I will suppose that you are descended from pious parents, and have enjoyed all the privileges of a

visible connexion with "the kingdom of God" from your very birth. I will assume that your knowledge of gospel truth is clear and extensive; that your moral character is without spot; that your natural disposition is amiable and kind; that your attendance upon the public means of grace is regular and apparently devout; and that your family is trained in similar habits of industry, and outward conformity to the will of God. I will take it for granted that you are honourable and esteemed among your fellow men; the friend of the poor, and ready to support with your property the ordinances of Christ. Your companions are found among the people of God, and the difference between you and them is scarcely perceptible, except in the single circumstance that you do not join them in their sacramental fellowships and their more solemn professions. Many think you pious, and many more wonder why you do not find your place within the visible fold of God. Your mind ponders all this, and asks, "What need I more?" And Satan, ready with his devices, suggests that nothing more *is* needed. But where in all this are "the things that accompany salvation?" the "repentance towards God, and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ," which the gospel every where requires? Where is the love to Christ, the absence of which entails a curse at his coming? Where is that submission to God as a sinner, which thankfully acquiesces in his terms of mercy, and prays for his blessing "in the name of Christ," and on the ground of his promise? Where is that "holiness," that supreme regard to God and to his glory, which is the very essence of the religious principle, and "without which no

man shall see the Lord?" You have the outward "form of godliness," but where is the spiritual "power," the living principle? Are not the words of God true and faithful? "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven," Matt. v. 20. "Ye must be born again," John iii. 7.

II. Again, then, you are brought to this point; the necessity of believing reliance upon Christ in order to salvation. But now it is suggested to you, *You do far more than believe already.*

True it is that when you do believe, none but those who are acquainted with your principles, and know how to estimate their importance, will be aware of any real difference in you, that is, on the supposition that your character is what has just been assumed. But in the sight of God, principles are of primary importance; and are they not so in the necessity of the case? Do you not always estimate the value of an action, according to the correctness and integrity of the principle from which it springs? One of your servants may render you the obedience you require as exactly as another; but is there no difference between the service which results from mere custom, or is rendered for the sake of reward, and that which springs from love? Has that man's honesty any moral worth, who is restrained from transgression, only by the impossibility of not being detected? It may be true that your general character and deportment present an apparently close conformity to the will of God, but it wants the right principle. What, then, is its real value? Besides, were the principle a

thing of inferior consideration, does the performance of one duty atone for the neglect of another? If your charity feed multitudes, does this destroy your obligation to "provide for them of your own house?" Faith in the divine Saviour is required of you, and you are expressly told that nothing can compensate for the want of it, or be put in the place of it; how, then, can you be saved without it? "The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination to the LORD;" and all are wicked, in God's account, who do not believe. What would you think of the condemned felon, who should be offered a free pardon upon his employing with the judge the mediation of an appointed advocate, but who, instead of thus acting, should proceed to allege his numerous virtues as an adequate compensation for his refusal to comply; who should say, that he had already that which was more valuable than the faith? In what respect does your conduct essentially differ from his?

III. It is plain, then, that you must seek salvation as "the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord," or remain destitute of it. But again it is hinted to you, that *many professed believers in Jesus Christ are by no means such consistent and good men as you are*; it cannot be, therefore, that your case is so hopeless as it is represented.

Far be it from me to palliate the sins of Christian professors. I pray God to discover to me my own, and to help me to forsake them. Sure I am that the gospel of Jesus Christ offers no extenuation of the guilt of believers. On the contrary, it is shown to possess aggravations peculiarly its own. No exhortations are so strong as those which urge on them the cultivation and practice of

holiness ; and no motives are so weighty and solemn as those which are derived from the privilege of union with Christ. If Christians act inconsistently and unworthily, they do it to their own cost, and in direct disregard of the cautions of their Lord. "God will visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes," *Psa. lxxxix. 31, 32.* "Their own wickedness shall correct them, and their backslidings shall reprove them," *Jer. ii. 19.* But whilst it is admitted that the obligations of believers are of the most stringent character, and that their transgressions and neglects are sins of the deepest dye, how does this justify you in refusing to "obey the gospel?" Let it be so, that your character is even more blameless than theirs, your observance of the sabbath and religious ordinances more regular than theirs, and your good works and alms-deeds more extensive than theirs, must we not "every one of us give an account of himself unto God?" If they should turn out after all to be nothing but hypocrites and unbelievers, will this justify you in disobedience to God? Would their condemnation be any relief to you, when you are made to endure the consequences of your sin? Or, what will all your goodness avail you, though it should even be found to possess all the valuable qualities which you claim for it, if you still want the "one thing needful?" The happiness of heaven is identical with, and inseparable from, the obedient service of God. Of this service "faith in God" is the grand principle. "Without faith it is impossible to please him." You cannot have this principle, as the principle of general obedience, until you

have first exercised it "towards Jesus Christ," in order to your forgiveness and acceptance with God. This is the beginning of "meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light." "He that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

IV. But it is still said, *faith is of no consequence, provided the practice be right.*

If this refer to faith, as an act of reliance upon Christ for salvation, this is a part of right practice; and it has been shown you already, that it constitutes the very first act of right practice. It is the sinner's penitential return to God, in obedience to the instructions of his mercy; and no practice can be acceptable until *he* is first accepted who performs it. But if it apply to faith, viewed more particularly as the belief of the gospel testimony, the conclusion is precisely similar. There can be no right practice without right principles. Holiness and truth are inseparable. There must first be correct sentiments, before there can be consistent obedience. Physical force, or brute instinct, may impel to a certain course of action, but voluntary service implies enlightened conviction of what is right. Our sentiments may turn out to be erroneous, but we think them right, and therefore we act upon them. Mere sincerity is no substitute for truth. A man may be sincere in what is decidedly wrong. "The Lord looketh on the heart," 1 Sam. xvi. 7, at the principle of action. "Every man according as he thinketh in his heart, so is he," Prov. xxiii. 7. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light; but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness," Matt. vi. 22, 23. The principle of an action determines

its quality. The tree must be first made good, and then the fruit will be so.

V. Perhaps it is now suggested that *religion will make you melancholy*. That you cannot thus fill your mind with divine truth, and borrow thence principles of action, without relinquishing much that is now pleasant to you, and throwing around your whole deportment an air of gloom, as repulsive to your friends, as it must be dismal to yourself.

Did you see any thing of this melancholy about your mother, when she took you on her lap, and taught you the first words of prayer, and tried to allure you to the Saviour in your very childhood? Was there any forbidding gloom about your father, as he conducted his business, day by day, upon religious principles; or sat at night in the bosom of his family to refresh his spirit with social intercourse: or went out to sanctify his leisure in doing good to others? You have the opportunity of forming an accurate opinion on this point, by observing the effect of religious influences upon multitudes around you. There may be here and there an affecting case of melancholy, the burden of whose sighing is the want of religion; and you may occasionally see a truly pious man, pressed down by afflictions and cares through the infirmities of the flesh. But how small a proportion do these cases bear to the number of instances in which religion triumphs over all difficulties, supports under all trials, and glories even in tribulations also?

But even this is not the true mode of settling this point. The question is, what is the natural tendency of religious influence? Left unembar-

rassed, to work out its own natural and holy results, does it tend to happiness, or otherwise? Let its own sacred records reply: "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. By whom also we have access by faith into this state of favour wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us," Rom. v. 1—5. It were easy to quote other passages, equally decisive of the question; but *one* is as satisfactory as *many*. What, then, is the conclusion? Religious influence is as happy as it is holy. By defective attention, or counteracting principles, its power may be enfeebled, and the degree of blessedness which it imparts may be lessened; and amidst the conflicting scenes of the present state its holy calmness may sometimes be disturbed, and its triumphant hopes temporarily interrupted: but the influence is the same. Religion requires not the sacrifice of one innocent pleasure; it sanctifies all the ordinary enjoyments of life; and it opens new sources of happiness, peculiarly and exclusively its own. "Be not deceived." Ten thousand voices in earth and in heaven, unite to testify, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

VI. Perhaps this is admitted generally. You cannot deny that it is true; and you would desire an interest in this blessedness at a future time. But you look at it, after all, as a kind of happiness

which, if it be not inferior in itself, is less desirable than some present gratifications which religion would forbid as unholy. And thus you are arguing yourself into compliance with the temptation to delay, which is now assailing you. Your general mistakes being rectified, and the temptations to neglect religion altogether, being set aside, you are now told that *there will be time enough to seek God, some months or years hence*. Meanwhile you may fairly enjoy yourself, and take up with religion by and by.

No fallacy is more common than this; but surely none is more hollow, or easier of detection. It recommends a line of conduct, altogether at variance with the commandments of God, which urge you to immediate and unhesitating decision. It encourages you to trifle with the mercy of God, by whom "righteousness is brought near" to you, and present salvation is offered you. It directs you to a course whose natural effect will be to steel your mind against all holy impressions, and which will lead you every day further from God, and render your conversion more difficult. But besides all this, it assumes one of the greatest uncertainties as its very basis, and treats it as if it were an established truth. Does the arch-deceiver hold your life in *his* hand? Has *He* "the keys of the unseen world, and of death?" What security have you that you will live another day? Health is no such security; its very vigour may destroy you. Youth is no such security; of multitudes it is true, that their sun goeth down while it is yet morning. A numerous and dependent family presents no security against the stroke of death; the sighing of the widow, and the tears of the orphan, are ever be-

fore us. In the midst of life you are in death. At a moment's warning your soul may be required. "Awake to righteousness and sin not." Had you even all the certainty of prolonged life and opportunities which the temptation assumes, what do you gain by delay? What but augmented guilt, a harder heart, and more bitter remorse? Why should you delay to do that which is admitted to be of first importance? Why postpone your happiness for a year? Is it wise to do it even for a day? But what an awful risk do you thus run for eternity? If death should come, what are the inevitable consequences? "Thus saith the Holy Ghost, *To-day*, if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart."

VII. But it is again suggested to you, that *a more favourable season than the present may be fairly calculated upon*. That there is uncertainty is not denied; but that the balance is decidedly in favour of continued opportunity is strongly insinuated; and many changes favourable to the formation of the religious character may be certainly looked for. The cares of your family will be diminished in a few years; the pressure of your business will be less; you will have more leisure, and some fair prospect of calmly and quietly attending to the interests of your soul.

To say nothing of the unfounded, and even false character of some of these assumptions, it is enough to remind you, that they all calculate upon continued life, which you know to be the most uncertain of all things, and that their professed object is one which cannot be gained. You may be placed in such altered worldly circumstances, as you are led to anticipate, but you will never have so favourable an opportunity to repent and

obtain salvation as you have now. The difficulty of being religious, does not lie in any external circumstances whatever ; whilst all circumstances have their peculiar besetments, and Jesus Christ has openly decided upon the special disadvantages of worldly ease, and wealth, and honour. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God !" The only real difficulty lies in the state of your own mind. It is your natural repugnance to the will of God, that prevents your obedience to it. This repugnance increases every hour, whilst you continue to indulge it ; and the overtures of divine mercy are continually less and less attractive and impressive, whilst you do not obey them. Your difficulty to overcome yourself and submit unto God, is greater now, than it was a few months or years ago, when first the truth gained your attention, and awakened your solitudes. What, then, have you to look for, but increased disinclination to the service of God ? True ; the grace of God is almighty, and can subdue all difficulties. But what promise have you that its power will be exerted at any future period ? All the promises of God have respect to the present time, and are made to immediate obedience. "Boast not thyself, then, of to-morrow." "Behold, *now* is the accepted time." Look around you, and see how few of those who have calculated upon a more favourable season have ever found it.

VIII. The same specious voice, however, whispers to you, that you hear continually, even from the most strenuous advocates of serious religion, of men who repent and are saved at the eleventh hour. It must therefore be concluded, that *repentance and salvation are easy on the bed of death* ; and you are urged to let them alone until that day come.

I will not now inquire as to the alleged cases of death-bed salvation, how many of them are cases of men who had neglected gracious opportunities of mercy all their lives; I may intimate, however, my strong impression, that satisfactory instances of conversion at death will chiefly —(I do not say always)—will chiefly be found amongst those who have seldom or never heard the gospel, and whose minds are not fortified against its appeals, by the numerous considerations which have so long kept you in disobedience and unbelief. But admitting the fact to be, as it is here assumed, I ask, how many instances do the same parties witness, of men who die leaving no evidence whatever of their genuine conversion to God? Far be it from me to limit the Holy Spirit of God. He can work, and may sometimes do so, even when men are passed beyond the influence of ordinary means. But we have no promise that he *will* do this, and we *can have* no evidence of it. The idea can afford therefore no relief. What I would gain from you is, a serious attention to the testimony of the dying themselves upon this point. Is there any thing to show, that to obtain an interest in “the great salvation” is easy at death? Numerous cases have I seen of gratitude to God, that the great work had not been left to the day of affliction, and the hour of death. Multitudes of times have I been told of the difficulty which there must have been to bring the heart to Christ, if it had not been brought before; and of the blessedness resulting from a conscious sense of “hope towards God.” Often have I heard the sad lamentation over a mispent life, and the fruitless wish that religion had not been neglected when the oppor-

tunities were so numerous, and so pregnant with mercy. And often have I witnessed the grossest ignorance of the way of salvation, and an almost utter carelessness about it, even when life was fast ebbing, and the cold death-sweat was already on the brow. What room is there, then, for the presumptuous procrastination which is recommended to you? Most men find it quite difficult enough to meet death with satisfaction, who have made the best preparation for doing so. "And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" 1 Pet. iv. 18. The gospel indeed provides that they should have an abundant entrance into the kingdom of God;" who have fled to Christ for refuge, aye, and requires too that they should so enter; and many do. But I speak simply to a fact, and that I may save you from longer yielding to delay. Will you not then "seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near?"

IX. To keep you still from God, it is perhaps now suggested that "*there is no hope.*" You have sinned away your day of grace, and God will not show you any mercy. It is now too late to seek the Lord.

Observe how the tempter seeks your ruin, and betrays his true character. It is but a little ago, that he would have persuaded you that your condemnation is all but impossible, and that God will never withhold his mercy. Now, when he finds that you have some inclination to seek it, he tells you that it is too late. "Be not deceived" by such a deceiver; no, not even upon this point. Truly, "he is a liar, and the father of it." Is there "no hope," when "God has so

loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life?" "No hope;" when "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin?" and "he is able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them?" "No hope;" when the invitations of the gospel are sounding in your ears, and striving with your heart? Is there "no hope," when Jesus says, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out?" Where is the sentence of divine truth, which excludes from the hope of salvation any sinner who is willing to receive it as "the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord;" whatever be his age, his circumstances, his weakness, his guilt? "The Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Try if you can increase the force and the extent of this encouragement. It is yours, in all its fulness.

X. But, after all, you are still told, that *there is no need of all this effort to be saved; that if you are appointed to salvation, you will be called; it is quite right to keep under the means; but you must wait for the effectual calling of the Spirit.*

True, indeed, it is that you need divine influence in order to your salvation. But this is promised, not to inactive waiting, but to believing prayer. And is there no need of effort? What, then, does the Saviour mean when he says, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able?" "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal

life, and they are they which testify of me." "Ask, and it shall be given you." "Deny yourself, and take up your cross, and follow me." The purposes of God cannot be the rule of your conduct; they are known only to himself. The written word is your directory, and this commands you to "obey the gospel," and live; and to do it *now*.

"None can come that shall not find,
Mercy called whom grace inclined;
Nor shall any willing heart
Hear the bitter word, Depart.
Come, ye bought, but not with gold:
Welcome to the sacred fold!"

XI.

THE PROMISE OF DIVINE INFLUENCE, THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT TO IMPROVE GOSPEL PRIVI- LEGES AND SERVE GOD.

Your position has now been shown you to be one of great privilege and responsibility. By various considerations arising out of its deficiency and its guilt, its danger and its obligations, I have endeavoured to persuade you to the holy improvement of it. I have tried to free you from the difficulties which arise in your mind, and to guard you against the temptations by which you are assailed. May I hope that you are now sincerely struggling against self and sin, anxious to embrace and love the Saviour? Are you longing after him, and earnestly desiring the sense of his favour. Are you trying to rise superior to all opposition, and to bring yourself

to his feet? Most affectionately do I entreat you not to look back. The struggle may be painful, but the issue will be blessed, if you persevere. A thousand encouraging considerations urge you to be steadfast, and warrant you to expect the "great salvation." You may now "groan, being burdened;" your guilt may alarm you; your weakness may hinder you; sin may strive within you; your prayers may seem to be all confusion and insincerity; you may be sometimes ready to give up all, and yield to despair. But be assured that deliverance is at hand, if you will be faithful. "Fear not, neither be dismayed." God will help you, and deliver you for his name's sake. Only cry unto him, and he will make "the light of his countenance to shine upon you, and will give you peace." *The rich grace of the gospel encourages you* to expect his blessing. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," Isa. i. 18. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye; yea come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price," Isa. lv. 1. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth, say, Come; and let him that is athirst, Come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely," Rev. xxii. 17. God is faithful; trust in him; he neither can, nor will, shut out your prayer. *His great long-suffering towards you encourages you* to look for the fulness of his mercy. If he had only designed to destroy you, would he thus have borne with you? If he had cherished no thoughts of mercy

towards you, would he have spared you until now? "His goodness leadeth you to repentance," Rom. ii. 4. "Account the long-suffering of God to be salvation," 2 Pet. iii. 15.—*Your own privileged position is full of encouragement.* "The commandment is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved," Deut. xxx. 12, 13. Rom. x. 6—9. Nothing is needed, but the due improvement of this position; to its encouraging aspect nothing can be added.—*All the promises of God encourage you* to yield yourself unto him, and to trust in his mercy through Jesus Christ. These address themselves to all the circumstances of your condition, and leave you nothing to desire beyond what they insure to you. They are "all yea and amen in Christ Jesus;" and they cannot fail.—*The prospect of everlasting life, which the gospel opens up to you,* should greatly augment your earnestness, and encourage your decision. Jesus is "gone to prepare a place" for all who believe in him; and "he will come again," to raise them up from the dead in his own image, and to "receive them unto himself." There the sins and sorrows of

this present state will all have passed away. Sinless purity, unwearied service, and unmingled happiness, will be your everlasting portion. Let "the joy that is set before you" encourage you to "lay aside every weight," and to press earnestly towards it.—*Your own state of mind is encouraging.* Your attention is gained, inquiry is excited; conscience is in some degree awake; you have something like "desire to the Lord," and "feeling after him." There is great mercy in all this. The Lord is at work with you. His truth is taking hold upon you. His Spirit is striving with you. To hope in him for that which you yet need is "your reasonable service."

But you are now proving the truth of what has been so often told you, that the grand difficulty in the way of your salvation, is the state of your own heart. You are now feeling that you want strength to conquer yourself. It is necessary, even now, that the truth of God should come to you with increased power,—that its influence over you should be far stronger,—in order that you may really bow to its authority, and experience the happiness resulting from its unfettered rule. You want to see it more clearly, and to feel it more deeply; you want to be both humbled and sanctified by it, in order that you may be saved. You are now convinced, that unless God work, all your working is vain. You now understand what is meant, not only by lying at God's mercy, but also by needing his help. You have been induced to consider his claims, and are desirous to seek his blessing. He is "drawing" you to himself; but you are held back by your own corruptions; you need succour, and guidance,

and strength from on high. The gospel promises you all this. *The promise of divine influence is, indeed, the chief encouragement to implore Gospel privileges and to serve God.* It is as certain, as any other of God's promises; and it demands from you a greatly increased degree of attention. Permit me to refer you to it, and to urge you to the right use of it. You may read it every where in the new covenant; but consider it more particularly, as embodied in two passages :—

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit unto them who ask him?” Luke xi. 13.

“Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call,” Acts ii. 38, 39.

If any doubt might be entertained as to the universal aspect of the former text, there can be none whatever as to that of the latter. The promise of the Holy Ghost is plainly coextensive with the proclamation of the gospel, and is designed to furnish the grand encouragement to evangelical obedience. Dependence on divine aid, and a confident expectation of it according to the promise, are both your duty and your privilege. A full understanding of the modes of divine influence is not indeed to be expected. Our Lord cautioned Nicodemus against expecting this. “The wind,” said he, “bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it

goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit," John iii. 8. But this should neither discourage, nor enfeeble your faith in the promise. You cannot trace the mode in which divine influence operates in natural things. You can observe that the promise of a yearly harvest is verified, when men have prepared the soil and sown the seed, and committed it to the blessing of Divine Providence. You are well persuaded that without His blessing, the seed would not spring and grow, but how his influence works to secure its growth you cannot tell. So here. The connexion in which divine influence may be expected is distinctly marked out ; a promise of it is given, as explicit and certain as that which commands and obtains the husbandman's faith in the culture of the field ; a promise, too, as extensively sustained by the results of experience ; your confidence in it should be equally firm, and your pursuit of the blessing equally diligent and persevering.

The great outlines of the doctrine are these. The agency, by which a sinner is led to God in penitence and faith, is divine ; " It is the Spirit that quickeneth." All mere human efforts are unavailing, without his accompanying grace ; " the flesh profiteth nothing." The instrument by which the Spirit works, and the use of which he blesses, is " the word of truth ;" " the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life," John vi. 63. The promise of divine grace implies sincere attention to the means of knowledge and of holy influence, on the part of those who receive it, " faith cometh by hearing," Rom. x. 17 ; " God will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him," Luke xi. 13 ; " Turn you

at my reproof; behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you; I will make known my words unto you," Prov. i. 23; "Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live," Isa. lv. 3. All these promises imply the further fact, that the influence of the Holy Spirit accompanies the exhibition of divine truth; and they fully warrant the expectation of the blessing, as the soul is yielded to the instructions, the persuasions, the injunctions of the truth. It is thus that the Holy Spirit "reproves the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment," John xvi. 8; it is thus that he enlightens the mind, and sanctifies the heart, Acts xxvi. 18; it is thus that he "takes of the things that are Christ's, and shows them unto us," John xvi. 13, 14. Into this process the conversion of sinners unto God is distinctly traced; "Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit, being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you," 1 Pet. i. 22—25. It is, then, in connexion with obedient attention to "the truth," that the influences of divine grace are to be found, and they are promised to "them who ask." You feel your need of them; your duty is plain; and, I will add, your encouragement to act accordingly could not be greater. Do not perplex yourself with any embarrassing suggestions of men about this great truth. Look at it in its simplicity, as it is now before you, sustained at every point by some citation from "the word of God." Remember that to make a holy use of it is your object. You are to consider this

doctrine, not to indulge an idle curiosity, or to settle metaphysical subtleties, but to help you to the attainment of that entire submission unto "God in Christ," upon which your personal salvation depends. The promise includes all you need. An interest in this good is an interest in "the fulness of Him who filleth all in all." Enlightening, quickening, purifying, restraining, persevering grace, is all included here. Observe, then, the terms of the encouragement: "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit unto them who ask him." The ground of encouragement is the superiority of God's benevolence, to that which governs your kindness to your children. This is implied to be very great; but, as every good thing which is in the creatures must be referred to God as its only proper source, how much greater must be the love of Him who is the fountain of love, than that which flows in one of the streams; and especially when you remember that the stream in this case is polluted by sin, whilst the fountain is purity itself? Amidst the pressure of your struggling anxieties, and under the sense of your own weakness and infirmity, be encouraged to "ask," and to expect, on the ground of his own promise, the aid of the Holy Spirit.

His benevolence is more disinterested than yours. Scarcely can your love to your children, under any circumstances, be truly disinterested. It will always have more or less of a reflex influence upon yourself. But when God loves sinful man, his love is necessarily disinterested, and it is entirely so. He can gain nothing from man. In

no one respect could the combined energies of our whole race add any thing to his resources, or augment, in the smallest degree, his happiness. Before him "all the inhabitants of the earth are as nothing." But how disinterested is his love, let the gift of his Son for our redemption teach you. If for either a righteous or a good man one should die, God hath far more "commended his love towards us, in that, when we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "He, then, that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" "Ask, and it shall be given you."

His benevolence is more tender and compassionate than yours. Your love to your children may be very great; most tenderly may you sympathize with their wants, and pity their sufferings, and seek their good. You may show them every possible kindness and indulgence, and be ready to forgive, again and again, their disobedience and ingratitude. But the appeal of the Saviour returns upon you in all its force. If in your hearts, which are evil, there is so much compassion, how much more tender is *his* love, who gave his Son for your salvation? Will he not pity you, and give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him? The same pity which he felt for sinners, when he devised and executed the plan of salvation, he now feels toward you; and, in the carrying out of that plan, do you think that he will not exercise his love as your circumstances may require? Hear his own words, and rest in his own assurances. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not

always chide ; neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins ; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame ; he remembereth that we are dust," Psa. ciii. 8—14.

"Ask, and it shall be given you." *His benevolence is more prompt than yours.* You are not backward to meet the reasonable requests of your children ; and sometimes you are even beforehand with them in your kindness. But the promptitude of your benevolence will not bear comparison with that of God. Does not the purpose of human salvation bear the date of eternity ? Is not Christ "the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world ?" Did not the first intimation of his mercy to fallen man sound in his ears in the very sentence that was pronounced upon his tempter, immediately after the detection of his sin, and before the declaration of his own doom ? Has not God always shown himself ready to listen to the cry of returning prodigals, and to pour upon them his mercy ? Is he not still "found of them who seek him not ?" Does he not every day cause his sun to shine, and his rains to descend upon the unthankful and the evil ? Is not this his promise, "It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer ; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear ?" Isa. lxv. 24. Trust his word. Take the encourage-

ment his love suggests. O, rely upon the promise of his grace, and "you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

But further let me remind you, that *his benevolence is more munificent in all its distributions, and more persevering, than yours.* Your love does not always lead you, even to your children, to do all the good you might. Nor are strictly prudential motives the sole cause of your withholding; much is to be ascribed to your parsimony, or your selfishness. But it is not so with God. Your disobedience towards him might justly have led him to withhold his favour, and to cease from seeking your welfare. But, no! his providence still watches over you, and cares for you. His gospel is continued with you, and his servants still seek your salvation. Privileges are still multiplied around you, and opportunities of obtaining eternal life are granted you. "The truth" persuades you, and his Spirit is even now striving with you. Will he not, then, hear your prayer, and fulfil your request? Will he not strengthen your weakness, and help your pursuit of his blessing? Take firm hold of his promise, and ask. "Ask in faith, nothing doubting." For,

His benevolence is more faithful than yours, to redeem its pledges, and fulfil its purposes. You cannot plead exemption from guilt, even in your promises to your children. But there is no unrighteousness with God. "He is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of Adam that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or, hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" O yes! "If we believe not, yet he

abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself." "Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near." Now, he is dealing with you in great mercy. Your present state of mind is one of abounding mercy, and it is pregnant with results of inconceivable importance. You are all but decided, and blessed for eternity. To neglect the due improvement of this season of mercy may be to close the door of hope upon yourself for ever.

Let, then, the love of God now "work in you that which is pleasing in his sight." He looks with favour towards you. His ear is open unto you. His heart is yearning over you. His salvation is freely offered unto you. By his word and by his Spirit he is calling you to "come, and take the water of life freely." Now, therefore, arise, and come. Cast yourself at his feet. Rise superior to every discouragement and every fear. "If thou wilt believe, thou shalt" even now "see the salvation of God." Only be in earnest about it. Cry mightily unto God for it, through faith in Jesus Christ, and the result is certain. Your sins shall be forgiven you for Christ's sake. The present conflict of your mind will issue in joy and peace. Your soul shall rest upon the "sure foundation;" and the hope of heaven shall from this hour become the polar star of your future course. "Take with you words," and "call upon the name of the Lord." "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

XII.

THE NOMINAL CHRISTIAN BROUGHT TO DECISION.

No transaction which this world ever witnesses is half so important as the humble submission of a sinner unto God, by faith in Jesus Christ. When the light of divine truth has dissipated the mists and errors of his natural condition, and, amidst the conflicting and unutterable emotions of his mind, he is constrained to cry out, "Lord, save, or I perish," that point is gained to which all the persuasions and entreaties of the gospel are designed to lead him, and upon which he will look back for ever with inconceivable interest and delight. How thankful shall I be, *beloved reader*, if to this point you are now prepared to come. Delivered from a thousand evil influences which have hitherto deceived you, and constrained by the vast encouragement which the Gospel supplies, it only remains that you follow the plain instructions of the word of life, to find yourself safe and happy on the bosom of the Saviour.

Reference has already been made to the case of Saul of Tarsus, as presenting a close parallel to that of the nominal Christian, in its privileges and its responsibilities; its prejudices and its difficulties. It is properly adduced as a specimen, both of the nature and transcendent importance of conversion unto God. His pride was severely wounded, before he was brought to renounce all dependence upon his personal excellences and his religious privileges; and it was after a severe

conflict with himself, and in deep anguish of heart, that he first prayed unto God for mercy. But in that hour when he first yielded himself at the feet of Jesus, a decision was taken from which he never looked back; a decision which gave the character to all his future life; which rendered him happy in sufferings, and triumphant in death; and upon the principles of which he now serves God and enjoys him in heaven. You need not be ashamed to acknowledge yourself, at this moment, the subject of a struggle similar to his; much less need you fear to copy his example and repeat his decision. It has occurred to me, that I cannot better help your decision, than by fixing your thoughts upon *his*. His own frequent references to it will help us to trace its process, and to understand its principles. At every point, the correspondence between your present state and his, at the time when he entered Damascus, will be found to be marked and striking. O that the result may correspond also! Why should it not? The *one thing* that decided him is that which must decide you. "Let me have joy of thee in the Lord, my brother."

I. *The discoveries of divine truth, out of which his decisions arose, were precisely those which are now before you.* He had enjoyed all the advantages of a visible relation to the kingdom of God, as it was then administered, even from his infancy. Nor could the youth who was "brought up in Jerusalem, at the feet of Gamaliel," at the very time when Jesus exercised his personal ministry and established the new dispensation, be ignorant of his history, or without strong inducements to examine his claims. Indeed, he teaches us to

regard his opposition to Christianity as sincere and conscientious ; whilst he lost sight of the spiritual nature of religion altogether, and rested his hopes for eternity upon his privileged position, his general consistency, and his religious formality. It was enough for him that he was "called a Jew." But, as in your case, God in his mercy brought "the truth as it is in Jesus" distinctly before him. The means by which his attention was gained were extraordinary and unusual, but the truth itself was the same as has been pressed upon your notice. When "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ," shone into his mind, immediately he saw all things differently. His views were at once completely changed ; and those discoveries which at first roused his indignation, and mortified his pride, became, upon reflection, the occasion of serious disquietude and deep anxiety. To be "called a Jew," and have a share in all the outward distinctions of God's people, he now saw to be a mere vanity ; involving, indeed, solemn responsibilities, but conveying no spiritual grace, and presenting no foundation for "hope towards God." It now appeared to him clear as day, that "he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh ; but that he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God." His "blameless" morality in the sight of men served only to show him more clearly his utter destitution of righteousness before God ; when the amazing purity of the divine law, reaching to "the thoughts

and intents of the heart," slew all his long-cherished hopes, and scattered all his dreams of personal goodness and divine acceptance. The sinfulness of "evil desire" flashed upon his view, when the law said, "Thou shalt not covet," and he learned, that "in his flesh, there dwelleth no good thing." He saw now, that there was in his case a radical and condemning deficiency, notwithstanding all his supposed virtues, and boasted self-commendations. His misimproved means of knowledge became at once the measure of his guilt. He saw his danger, he felt his need of pardon, and of a better righteousness than his own to justify him before God; he was compelled to renounce all dependence upon himself, and to confess that he was entirely dependent upon the divine mercy. However his proud spirit might revolt at the discovery, the statements of gospel truth were then, as now, too plain to be deliberately mistaken; and however his unbelief might labour to justify his continued refusal to rely upon the merits of Jesus for acceptance with God, nothing was plainer than the solemn assurance, "If ye believe not that I am he, you shall die in your sins." To open his mind, therefore, to the instructions of the gospel was his only alternative, nor could he find any rest to his spirit, until he did so in sincerity, and humility, and faith. His own deliberate review of his decision, many years afterwards, when he had both done and suffered much in the cause of the Saviour, and when he knew not but that the martyr's crown was immediately before him, is exactly to this effect. "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised

the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews ; as touching the law, a Pharisee ; concerning zeal, persecuting the church ; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord : that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith," Phil. iii. 4—9, comp. with Rom. vii. Thus it was that he obtained relief from the painful apprehensions of everlasting misery which the discovery of his deficiency and guilt had awakened, and that he pledged himself to the new course which he subsequently pursued ; and pursued with unmingled satisfaction and joy to the close of life.

II. His decision was not however an easy affair. Nor was it the business only of an hour. Much was gained when on the road to Damascus he fell to the earth, "and trembling and astonished, said " unto Jesus, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" But it was not until the third day afterwards that it was said to Ananias concerning him, "Behold, he prayeth." All the difficulty, indeed, was within himself ; and it aggravated *his* guilt, as your reluctance to embrace the Saviour aggravates *yours*. *The emotions of mind under which his decision was taken, were very similar to those which you now experience.* The fact that nothing but a cordial submission to "God in

Christ," could bring peace to his mind, or give safety to his state, ought to exert all its force upon you. The light of truth has shown you also your affecting deficiency, and your awful danger. You also are "fallen to the earth," and as Saul was, in "trembling and astonishment." The discoveries which have been made to you fill you with surprise. You could not have believed that such evils dwelt within you; and you wonder how you could so long be blind to them. Your danger alarms you. You tremble to think of the righteous anger of God, and most earnestly do you deprecate its alighting upon you. Gladly would you shake off your convictions, but you cannot. The arrow is in your heart. You are afraid to look up to God, lest he should spurn you from his presence; or you are ashamed to do so, feeling that you are vile. Yet you are satisfied that you must cast yourself upon the promise of his mercy in the Lord Jesus, or perish; and you dare not deny that you have every encouragement to do so. Abased and confounded, you even "loathe yourself in your own sight, because of your sinfulness." Fain would you have escaped from the only course that is open to you; that of obedience to the gospel. But you cannot. You are torn with anxieties, and pressed with difficulties. It is not knowledge you want; your duty is plain, but are hesitating to perform it. Grief and remorse; pride and shame; fear and hope, are all struggling together within you. You are "shut up" to the faith of the gospel; yet you do not submit yourself. You are reluctant, yet assenting; objecting, yet believing; delaying, yet yielding. The thoughts of your heart are too


big for utterance ; and the feelings you experience are too strange and too varied for description. Whether you will now yield to the constraining influence of the love of Christ, and do that which you know to be right : or, whether you will try to harden yourself still in your neglect of the "great salvation," is the point to be decided. Your mind is like a balance vibrating alternately to either side. You are compelled to confess that your only safe ground of hope, is in dependence upon the merits of Christ, and devotedness to his glory ; yet you are strangely striving to avoid this course. The pride that keeps you back from submission, holds you still in unhappiness and fear. You know that I draw no fancy picture. It is true to the life. In the glass of Paul's history, you see your own countenance. Thus he agonized when the throes of the new birth were upon him ; and thus are you still "seeking rest and finding none."

III. Let me advance a step further. *The sacrifice which you hesitate to make in order to your salvation is precisely similar to that to which he was called.* You now find that self-immolation is no easy affair. To surmount every proud reasoning, every deeply rooted prejudice, every long-cherished objection, and to "present yourself a sacrifice, living, holy, acceptable unto God," feeling that it is "your reasonable service," Rom. xii. 1 ;—this is the task. Yet you well know that "upon the altar which sanctifieth both the gift and the giver," you must thus place the "living sacrifice," or you must come short of heaven at last. To be told that "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,"—this is your grand

—your last stumbling block. But why should you shrink from a species of humiliation, in itself so simple, so reasonable, so holy ; a humiliation, which issues in every case as in that of Paul, in a “peace that passeth all understanding,” and a hope full of immortality ? Those “three days” which Paul passed at Damascus, in blindness and without food, witnessed just such a scene of deep mental conflict, as that through which you are now passing ; and the cause was the same. The truth was gaining an increased hold upon his mind, but his old prejudices strove hard to regain their ascendancy ; his self-righteous hopes struggled to recover their power within him ; and all his former sins concurred with all the temptations of Satan, to hinder his surrender to the holy Saviour. What hard thoughts of God ; what contemptuous thoughts of Jesus ; and what proud thoughts of himself did those “three days” witness ! What fears of reproach, and persecution, and death ;—what love of self, and love of sin ;—what deference to human friendships, and popular opinion, and worldly gain, had during those “three days” to be overcome ! Then it was that the great question was to be decided ; “Wilt thou also be his disciple ?” Then was it so urged upon him, that escape from a definitive reply was impossible. Just as it is with you ; so it was with him. You dare not say, *no* ; you do not say, *yes*.

IV. But the one thing which decided Saul is that which must now decide you. You are a sinner, “ready to perish.” You are as unhappy as you are unholy. Life and death, a blessing and a curse, heaven and hell, are before you. Can you hesitate ? The only hinderance to your

salvation is your own self-righteous pride. Shall it destroy you? Your case is urgent in the extreme. *Let "the love of Christ constrain you."* "He was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God, but he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross;" that you "might not perish, but have everlasting life." He saw you dead in sins, and under the curse; and he pitied you, and "came to seek and to save that which was lost." "He suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring you unto God." Read the story of his sufferings. Muse on his agony in the garden, and his conflict upon the cross. All this he bore for you. "He was wounded for your transgressions; he was bruised for your iniquities; the chastisement of your peace was upon him." "The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness' sake." "By his stripes you may be healed." Think you, that if salvation could have been otherwise bestowed upon you, that it would have been bought at such a price? O, no! You were without help, and without hope, when Jesus undertook your cause. And how does he love you still! His word of mercy calls you to himself. His arms are open to embrace you. He will not upbraid you for all your ingratitude and unbelief. His promises all warrant and encourage your approach to him. He is able to save; he is willing to save; he is waiting to save. Shall he *now* call in vain? Will you not *now* yield to the sweet persuasive influence of his love? "All power is given unto him in heaven and on earth." Every



spiritual good is in his hand. Believe his promise, and ask his blessing ; and "all is yours." Pardon and peace ; and hope and life—even "life for evermore ;" "all is yours." On earth, he wept for you, and died for you. In heaven he "waits to be gracious" unto you ; and now he bids you welcome to all he is, to all he has. "O taste, and see that the Lord is good." Can you withhold your heart from him ? Is he not worthy of all he asks ? Will not your surrender unto him entail a benefit upon yourself, unspeakably great ? Do I not even now witness the uplifted eye of penitence and faith ? Is not your heart ready to burst with emotions of gratitude and love ? Do I not hear you exclaiming :

"Lord, thou hast won ; at length I yield ;
My heart, by mighty grace compell'd,
Surrenders all to thee :
Against thy terrors long I strove,
But who can stand against thy love !
Love conquers even me."

It is done. Your purpose is taken. Your heart is fixed. Your vow is recorded. Jesus Christ is "all your salvation and all your desire." You are "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son." What a change ! "For you to live is Christ, and to die is gain." The conflict of your troubled breast is over. New principles are already impelling you to new acts. You "thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead ; and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and who rose again." Full of joy and peace in believing, you are now ask-

ing, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" To glorify him upon the earth, and then to serve him for ever in heaven, is now your great concern. In what a new light does every thing appear to you! Upon what a new sphere of activity and enjoyment do you seem to have entered! Nature, providence, religion; all are new. Friends, companions, relatives; all are new. Time and eternity; how different the estimate which you form of them! God is your Father. Christ is your Saviour. The Holy Spirit is your Comforter. Earth is your lodge. Heaven is your home. Happy man! Instead of confessing with reluctance, that you are "almost persuaded to be a Christian;" you have caught the spirit of Paul's benevolence, and are saying, "I would to God, that all" in whose welfare I am interested—my brethren of mankind in every place, "were both almost and altogether such as I am." Now you understand that "the form of godliness is not the power." "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing."

V. You are won by love. This was the great motive that determined Paul's decision. "When it pleased God," says he, "who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood," Gal. i. 15, 16. It was the discovery of the glorious grace of Jesus, seen in all its merciful adaptation to his case of guilt and ruin, that humbled his heart, and brought peace to his spirit. When he took God at his word, and learned to "trust for life in him that died," the tumult of his breast was hushed, and the purposes of his new life were all taken.

Let your decision now resemble his. Let there be no "conferring with flesh and blood;" no hesitating to act upon your convictions of what is right; no yielding to fear; no indulgence of a captious spirit; no presumption; no despair. The path of life is open before you. Your obligations to redeeming love are of the highest order, and the greatest amount. Much is forgiven you, you must love much. With every talent, natural or acquired; with every opportunity to do good which Providence shall grant you; with your entire energy of body and of mind; in every relation of life, and amidst all its changing scenes and circumstances, you are now to be the Lord's. "Not slothful in business," you are at the same time to be "fervent in spirit, serving Him." Your character is to be holy; your example, holy; your temper, holy; your speech, holy; your business, holy. The principles of the gospel are to pervade your whole walk and deportment. You are to be in the world as Christ was in it, to sanctify it and to bless it. Your zeal for *him* must subordinate every thing to itself; and your hope in *him*, by its living power and happy influence, must commend your religion to all around you. In order to this, you will need to exercise great watchfulness; to abound in prayer; to keep your heart with all diligence; to increase daily in the knowledge of God; to seize on all opportunities of social and public worship; and to avail yourself of all the benefits which arise from the fellowship of the church of Christ. Above all, you will need a large supply of holy influence from the Spirit of all grace. This is promised to you. Arise, therefore, and "go forth in the

strength of the Lord God, making mention of his righteousness, even of his only." You will require caution, but you need not yield to fear. Walk humbly with your God, and all will be well. Your career may not be so eminently useful as that of Paul, but it will be equally happy, if you are faithful.

"May the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that you have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

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